





Mary J. Mayin

ANNA CLAYTON;

OR,

THE MOTHER'S TRIAL.

A Tale of Real Life.

BY MRS. H. J. MOORE,

AUTHOR OF THE GOLDEN LEGACY.

"Through suffering and sorrow thou hast passed,
To show us what a woman true may be."

NINTH EDITION.

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE unexpected favor with which "ANNA CLAYTON" has been received by the public, requiring another and larger edition within a few hours from its first appearance, shows that "*Real Life*" has not yet lost its charms, amidst the wild vagaries of fiction and romance.

The principal characters and scenes in this "tale" are drawn from life. Imagination cannot picture deeper shades of sadness, higher or more exquisite joys, stranger labyrinthine mazes, than *truth* has woven for us in "THE MOTHER'S TRIAL."

Here, in the heart of New England, lived, and, for aught we know, still live, our prototypes. The same blighting influences are even now insidiously creeping around our firesides; and, while we disclaim either bitterness or prejudice toward those who are blindly led, we would raise the finger of warning against the *leaders* in this "Mystery of Iniquity."

BOSTON, May 7, 1855.

ANNA CLAYTON.

CHAPTER I.

——— "If there be a human tear
From passion's dross refined and clear,
'Tis that by loving father shed
Upon a duteous daughter's head."

SCOTT'S "LADY OF THE LAKE."

BEFORE a cheerful, crackling fire (for those were not the days of Lehigh), in the family-room of an old mansion, sat, or rather leaned, one whose silvery locks and careworn features denoted that he had fulfilled the "three-score years and ten" allotted to man. Long and vacantly he gazed, but not at the gracefully-curling smoke that wreathed itself into fantastic forms, and ascended to mingle with the pure air of heaven, leaving a long train to follow at leisure; nor at the glowing embers beneath, bright and genial though their influence might be; — no, the gaze of the old man bent not upon any outward object; his communings were deep within the spirit's shrine, and there, spread before his mental vision in almost startling reality, were the various scenes through which he had passed; the many years he had ministered in

spiritual things to the flock that now seemed so dear to him ; the loved ones he had laid to rest in the green churchyard ; the blessings that had been showered upon him in the midst of griefs. Brightest of all these blessings, stole softly and sweetly the image of one who, for nineteen years, had been enshrined within his heart, — worshipped, next only to his God ; whose first breath came freighted with the parting blessing of a sainted mother, and to whom, with his boundless wealth of love and tender care, ever pouring its exhaustless treasures at her feet, he had been father, mother, *companion* ! Now his head leaned more heavily upon his breast, and gentle, sorrowful tears were coursing down his furrowed cheek, when a merry, joyous, silvery laugh rang through the room, as, with a light bound, a fair girl sprang into his arms.

“ A penny for your thoughts, my dear father ! ” said she, gayly ; “ here you sit, moping over the fire, just where I left you nearly an hour ago, while I have been to see Aunt Susie, and poor Mrs. Rowley, who is so sick, and black Cato, and sweet, patient Ellen Leslie, and ” — but here the tearful eyes which met her own checked her utterance ; and, impulsively clasping her arms about his neck, her fair ringlets mingling with his snowy locks, her tears fell with almost childish exuberance.

“ My child ! — my darling, this must not be ! — why should I grieve you ? ” — and, with a mighty effort stilling the throbs of his own swelling heart, he exclaimed, in attempted cheerfulness, “ Why, what would Herbert say, should he see his Bessie, the prize for which he has so long and so honorably striven, and which he thought was to be conferred upon him with deep thankfulness that the winner was worthy of that

which he had so earnestly sought, — how would he feel should he see her now in tears, on the very eve of that consummation which she often assured him would only perfect her happiness! Nay, nay, do not speak now; I know all your heart would dictate; I know you would give up even Herbert, dear as he is to you, rather than cause your old father's heart to bleed, as you just now felt that it did. Bless you, darling, for that devotion, and may God bless you," — and here the trembling hands and lips were raised to heaven, — "as I now do, for all the light, life and joy, with which you have filled this otherwise desolate heart! Such a treasure as you have been to me, may you prove to him who has your pure young heart in his keeping!"

"But, father, listen to me;" and, as she spoke, her whole frame quivering with emotion, her slight figure drawn up with unwonted decision, she seemed to shadow forth that blending of rare loveliness and gentleness with an unwavering obedience to the right which were so fully perfected in her after life; — "listen, and believe me when I say that, deeply and truly as I love Herbert, — and how deeply and truly none save my own soul can know, — there is yet a shrine in my heart which not even his love can approach, — where only is the image of one who has been to me father, mother, brother, sister; and can I see the shadow of such great grief falling upon my revered father's heart, and not declare, as I now do, that —"

"Stay that declaration, my dear child, if you would not distress me still more! There is a shadow falling on my heart, but 't is the shadow of an angel, beckoning me on to joys untasted, to glories unseen, to sweet communings with her

who has long been waiting in the spirit-land; and the last wish of my heart will be gratified, as I to-morrow give to Herbert the greatest boon this earth affords, — a cheerful, loving, truthful wife.”

“Plase yer honor, Misther May, an’ shure there’s a letther for yees, and the man will be afther waiting for an answer,” said Bridget, thrusting her head in at the door; “but, bedad, yees all in the dark, shure.”

Before she had done speaking, Bessie, with noiseless step, had lighted the social astral, and drawn her father’s chair near the table, where she stood, impatiently waiting for him to adjust his glasses, take a deliberate survey of the outside, and then as deliberately unfold the letter, which to her quick and unerring instinct was in some way connected with him who on the morrow would lead her to the altar.

“Bessie, dear,” said Mr. May, looking up with a quiet smile, as he handed her the missive, “here is an ordeal for you to pass, which, if I mistake not, will be rather trying to one so sensitive and delicate. What say you, — for it is a matter you alone must decide, — shall the good people of Asheville satisfy their curiosity by looking at the sweet face of their minister’s wife as she first takes upon herself those vows; or, as they express it, ‘show their respect for their beloved pastor, the Rev. Herbert Lindsey, by escorting him and his bride to their future home’? ’T will be a trial, love, but a small one, I fear, compared with many which must follow, and from which a father’s love would fain shield you, but cannot. Speak, darling, and tell me what answer to give to this request.”

“What would Herbert say, father?” gently replied she,

while a shade of anxiety and disappointment passed over her face.

“Spoken like my own Bessie, ever mindful of the wishes of those she loves, and ever ready to make any sacrifice for them. Doubtless he would like to gratify his people, but not if it must wound the feelings of his gentle bride.”

“Then, father,” said she, with an arch smile, “tell them Mr. May and his daughter, grateful for their condescension, will be most happy to receive them.”

And so it was settled that in the church where her loved voice had first lisped the Saviour’s name, and had since mingled its sweetness in their simple, heart-felt melodies, that voice should once more be heard, uttering the vows which severed her from her childhood’s home forever.

CHAPTER II.

“O, hush the song, and let her tears
Flow to the dream of her early years :
Holy and pure are the drops that fall
When the young bride goes from her father’s hall ;
She goes unto love yet untried and new —
She parts from love which hath still been true.”

MRS. HEMANS.

BRIGHTLY the morning sun shone over the village of B——, and sweetly the birds sang, — never more sweetly, thought Bessie, as she, at early dawn, with step light, yet pensive, thought sweet, yet sad, sought her own little nook in the garden. Sacred be thy communings, sweet maiden ! we will not venture within this consecrated spot, but breathe for thee the prayer that thou mayest come forth strengthened for all thy life’s trials ; and above all for the great sorrow that even now is hovering over thee, and though on thy happy bridal-day, cannot be averted from thee.

“O, Nancy, Miss Nancy, do help me put on this white dress !” said Nelly Lee, bursting into Miss Nancy Ellis’ room, to her utter dismay and confusion, as the secrets of her toilet were thus suddenly exposed to the rude gaze of the mischievous girl, — “I took it out of my drawer this morning, where I laid it last fall, and Kitty has ironed it so nice and now I

can't get it on; and 'tis so vexing, too, for all of us girls want to dress just alike, and carry flowers to strew in the aisle for the bride to walk on; and they are gathering them now, and I'm afraid I shall be late; do help me, that's a dear, good Miss Nancy!" said the now breathless girl, coaxingly throwing her arms about her.

"I'm sure I don't know why there should be such a fuss, just because Miss Bessie May has taken it into her head to get married!" said Nancy, tartly; "and then, too, to think of her boldness in going to the church,—just as if she was afraid there wouldn't be folks enough to see her at home! I admire modesty," said she, complacently viewing her hard features in the glass;—"but come here, child, and I'll help you;" and, with much straining, pulling, and a little rending,—for, unconsciously to herself, little Nelly's form was fast rounding and developing to its perfection,—the dress was made to stay on—fit it certainly did not. But Nelly still lingered, though she was just now in such haste, and, looking sadly at Miss Nancy,

"I did n't know," said she, "that you hated our dear Bessie; I thought everybody loved her."

"Well, well, child, you are too young to understand these things;" and, having no older listener, she continued, partly to her and partly to herself,— "to think that she should drag her old father out just to make a display of herself, when, I venture to say, he would prefer a quiet time at home!"

"That an't true!"—and Nelly stamped her little foot violently,— "for Bridget, who lives at Mr. May's, was over to our house last night, and said that a man brought a letter, and she carried it to Mr. May, and he was so busy-like that

he didn't know she was in the room, and 'twas all about her young mistress being married in church; and Bessie cried about it, but said she would do as her father bid; so, Miss Nancy,"—and the little face was full of triumph,—“what do you think now?”

“Think,—why, I think just as I always did, that she's a little upstart, and an't no better'n she ought to be, neither; and I shall just give some o' them folks that come from his place a piece of my mind about it, too!”

This was rather too much for Nelly; and, her bosom heaving with indignation and wrath, she seized a saucer of paint and a long row of pearly-white teeth that lay upon the table, and, dashing them into a thousand pieces upon the floor, she exclaimed, “And I shall tell them, Miss Nancy, that you could n't come to the wedding because a little girl threw your teeth on the floor and broke them, and spilt all your paint!” and peal after peal of merry laughter rang through the house as she escaped Miss Nancy's indignation, the thought of her woful plight disarming all her childish anger.

Poor Miss Nancy! her wrath knew no bounds. How could she now carry out her plan of visiting this, that and the other one, and diffusing a little of her bitterness of spirit among them all? And the wedding, too, where she had expected to shine so conspicuously in a certain way,—what *can* she do? And to think of that little mischievous madcap being the cause of it all! “O, what torments children are!” said she, as, quickly fastening the door, she buried her face in her hands, and gave way to a violent fit of weeping.—Who shall say they were not, to her?

Never before was there heard such a peal as now burst

forth from the church-bell. Can that be old John the sexton? If so, he must certainly be inspired; for so plainly do its deep tones speak to every heart, that, at its bidding, old and young, rich and poor, all bend their steps towards its open portals. And now the village-green seems peopled with fairies, as from behind every bush, from every nook and corner, there springs forth what would seem to be a wilderness of flowers, were it not that here and there a roguish eye would peep from under a bunch of roses, or a stray curl or dimpled arm proclaim some *humanity* in that moving garden.

The little church had been transformed by these fairies into a perfect bower of roses and evergreens; and, as they stood with joyous faces and beaming eyes, showering with fragrance the pathway to the altar, what wonder that the venerable man should pause to call down blessings on their young hearts; or that the tall, manly form, which supported the trembling bride, bowed in grateful acknowledgment of this simple, characteristic offering of innocence!

Long would we linger around that altar; for, in the deep, tremulous voice of him who resigns his last, cherished treasure to another's keeping, are tones not of earth, and the melody which wells forth from every heart in the bridal chorus is swelled by the sweeter strains of an angel band. She, who has so long hovered around the loved ones with gentle, heavenly ministrations, is even now permitted to breathe words of peace and joy into the lone man's soul, and, with spotless robe and crown in view, to beckon him away to his treasures in heaven. As with outstretched arms and streaming eyes the father and pastor invokes God's blessing upon his flock, an invisible presence seems to fill every heart; even the little

ones look upon him with awe, and pass him with unwonted reverence. Amid smiles and tears, congratulations and murmurings, blessings from the old and good wishes from all, the gentle, blushing bride was proudly led forth by the now happy husband. Many a kindly word was spoken, many a token of affection pressed into her hand, ere she was permitted to depart to the home and people which were henceforth to be hers.

“O, how we shall miss her!” sobbed Miss Nancy Ellis, as, with her colorless face bound in cotton, she stretched forth her long neck to gaze after the departing carriages.

“Why, Miss Nancy,” said little Nelly, who had been standing unobserved near her, “why, how can you say so?” and, turning away in disgust, she gathered a little group about her, and in a low voice, interrupted with constant bursts of merriment or indignation, she told the mishaps of the morning, as with frequent and meaning gestures she pointed to the face covered up for pretended ague. It was well for Nelly that she deferred her story till now; for, so dangerous was their glee,—none the less boisterous for the woful aspect of Miss Nancy before them,—that many an outgrown dress, beside hers, bore testimony to its effect.

CHAPTER III.

“What a world were this,
How unendurable its weight, if they
Whom death hath sundered did not meet again !”

SOUTHEY.

THE church, just left vacant and lonely by the departure of the bridal party, and within which still lingered sweet influences of visible and invisible spirits, — the unwithered and blending fragrance of flowers betraying the nearness of the former, and the hush and thrill of spirit ever attending the overshadowing presence of the latter, — was one of those venerable structures so often met with in New England till the hand of improvement, or, as we should rather say, of change, swept them from the earth, but not from the cherished remembrance of many who worshipped within their ancient walls. How well do we remember the veneration and awe with which we (child as we were) gazed up into the enclosure midway, we thought, between heaven and earth, as though not of either, where stood the inspired man of God in flowing robes ; how often have we likened it, in our youthful imagination, to the scenes of the judgment day, when he who was to pronounce the doom of all should occupy that sacred desk, while Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with other glorified

beings whose seats in heaven were already secured, should sit in solemn state where sat those six deacons, with faces as devout and serious as though the fate of worlds rested upon them! And then those stately square pews, with innumerable little alleys as pathways to them,—how expressive of the gathering together of each family in its exclusively social relations before the final separation! I confess my youthful fancies have often led me through many such imaginary scenes of weal and woe, while my honest, sober-minded parents were congratulating themselves that one, at least, of their number, was an attentive listener to the holy man's words.

The ministerial office of those days was far from being the "come and go" affair of the present age. Then it was choosing a home for life, and on both sides was the union one which only death should dissolve. Consequently the settlement of a minister was an era long to be remembered, and seldom witnessed more than once by the same generation. This was true of the good people of B——; for only a few among the aged could recall the time when Mr. May came among them, in all his youthful ardor, and, after a mutually agreeable acquaintance, was ordained as their future spiritual teacher, amid the gaze of multitudes from far and near. The mingled love and reverence with which they still regarded him testified alike to his faithful fulfilment of those solemn vows, and to their docility and love of all things good. They had borne his sorrows on their hearts when he laid his dearly-loved wife in their green church-yard; and they had watched with joy the gradually unfolding and developing beauties of his bud of promise, the lovely Bessie. What wonder, then, that the transplanting of this flower to another garden should

have been a great event in their history, or that the day chosen for her nuptials should, by common consent, have been enjoyed as a holiday for all?

As the bridal cortège wound slowly from their sight, groups of men, women and children, were eagerly discussing the many incidents always attendant upon a country wedding, while here and there were busy housewives, intent on their preparations for a "bit o' gossip and a cup o' tea" with their neighbors. Thus the day wore on to its close, when, as if by preconcertion, there was a general gathering on the village green, partly to discuss the exhaustless subject of the morning's occurrence, and also to mingle their sympathies with their beloved pastor, who, they doubted not, would come forth to meet them, and whose house was now indeed made desolate. Expectant eyes were often turned towards the "parsonage," but none appeared in answer to their silent call, till at length the porch door opened, and Bridget, the faithful servant, came slowly towards them, to see if her master had been well cared for. Great was her consternation when informed that he had not been seen by any one since the services of the morning.

"Alack a day, and isn't it meself as feared what's coming!" cried she; "and shure is n't it me own eyes as saw him go to the grave of his leddy, yonder, last night aboot twelve! and wasn't I a trimblin' and shiverin' when I see him doun on his knees, an' the grass all damp and cowl'd at his feet! And, the blissid Virgin save me! jist as I stipt out to warn him, may be didn't I see the leddy herself risin' out o' the ground and kneelin' beside him! Och! an' isn't a beryin, it betokens, sich as the likes o' me would niver see

agin?" And, wringing her hands, poor Biddy seemed beside herself with grief and fright. How much influence her story evidently a mixture of truth and imagination, had with her hearers, could scarcely be estimated; but of one thing they were assured, which sufficiently alarmed them, without reference to the supernatural,—their pastor had not been seen by any one since his morning's trial. Old John the sexton now remembered that when Mr. May parted with the bride at the carriage he went back into the church and shut the door; but, as he thought, he did it that he might gain his own house by a more private way. After a moment's consultation, a few of the older ones approached the church, and, noiselessly unclosing the door, gazed with speechless reverence upon the scene before them. Seated upon the same spot where he had given away his last treasure, the long, whitened locks flowing upon his shoulders, his head resting upon the desk in front, so absorbed, apparently, in deep revery that he had taken no note of the advancing shades of evening, the old man had passed his first solitary day. Was he not surrounded by ministering spirits, all eager to pour the balm of consolation into his heart? So, at least, thought those who gazed, as, silently withdrawing, they joined their neighbors; and, imparting their own deep sympathy, all quietly sought their homes, save a few of the faithful who remained to watch the coming forth of their beloved pastor.

The trial of parting with his only child, even though the separation was but partial, had proved far greater and more unendurable than Bessie's father had ever anticipated. Hastily turning from the carriage as it moved away, that his emotion might not be observed, he sought the solitude of his own loved

sanctuary, and instinctively bent his steps to the altar where, but a few short moments since, he had consummated a union which his judgment approved, but which sundered a tie whose strength he had never before so fully realized. And now, with head bent in deep communings with his own spirit in its great grief, did the soft, sweet whisper of the angel of hope pervade his soul. Tremblingly did the long-tried servant listen to its words, as they gently breathed to him of heaven, and home, and rest. The outward man moved not, stirred not, breathed not ! but from the shrine of his inner self did there go up joyful thanksgiving and praise, and with his spiritual eyes did he discern hosts of enraptured beings, in spotless robes and crowns of glory, awaiting his coming, while she who had ever been his guardian angel, with one hand clasped in his and the other pointing to the golden gates, gently drew him on, and together they winged their way to the celestial paradise.

Can it be that these seeming realities are but the fantasies of a troubled mind ? or have his long years of devotion and self-sacrifice been at length rewarded by the welcome invitation — “Come, ye blessed,” — so sweetly given and so joyfully met as to seem but a glorious dream ? The sobs, tears, and heart-felt exclamations, of those who, many hours after, found him still in the same position, but stiff and cold in death, proclaimed that this vision was but the happy exit of a redeemed soul from earth.

Again do the deep tones of the church-bell reverberate through hill and dale, but with each solemn toll do the hearts of this bereaved flock sink deeper and deeper, for well they recognize the mournful call to go forth and consign their

beloved pastor to his last long rest beside the mound he has so often watered with his tears, where sleeps the bride of his youth. Scarcely less deep is *their* grief than that which wrings *her* heart, who but three days since received in paternal blessings his last words on earth.

As the grave closes over that loved form, which, for many years, has moved among them in all godliness and humility, and within which throbbed a heart ever keenly alive to their varying interests, every bleeding, sorrowing heart pays its tribute alike to his worth and their own irreparable loss. Sleep on, thou chosen of the Lord! For thee shall no monumental stone be reared, to tell of thy greatness; but in the simple marble slab do we read the devotion of thy life to its great end, and the place of thy repose is indeed holy ground.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Lay this into your breast :
Old friends, like old swords, still are trusted best.”

WEBSTER.

“ Our first love murdered is the sharpest pang
A human heart can feel.”

YOUNG.

FROM the grave of her revered father, every fibre of her quivering heart rent with agony as it was thus severed from its long resting-place, Bessie went forth, with him who was now her only earthly treasure, to the home he had chosen for her. Deeply imbibing the childlike, submissive spirit, ever shining so brightly in him who was now reaping its reward, and feeling that henceforth *his* spirit would be suffered to watch over her, she did not permit her selfish sorrow to darken the path before her. Gratefully she received the quiet manifestations of sympathy from those to whom she was now to be so closely bound; and with deep, fervent thankfulness did she bless her heavenly Father, who had thus kindly opened the hearts of her husband's flock to receive the orphan bride. Nor did the unsurpassed beauties of nature, of which Asheville could so justly boast, lose their effect in softening the shadows resting on her heart. The wide-spreading elms which

sheltered her new home, and which, as far as the eye could reach, lined on either side the village road; the bright, sparkling river, coursing its way through the green fields, and merging itself, not far distant, into the broad Atlantic; the diversified scenery of hill and dale, woodland and plain, dotted here and there with the pleasant homes of their people, could scarcely fail to charm away sorrow from one even less enthusiastic than Bessie.

Released, in a measure, from home duties, by the faithfulness of her old nurse Bridget, she would wander forth at early dawn, and, inhaling new life with each passing breeze, seek some quiet nook where she could in his silent temple worship the God of nature. Thus was her spirit strengthened for life's trials, and her heart filled with a peace reflecting itself in the kind words and loving smiles with which she sought to cheer her husband's home.

A few short months, which to her seemed but as so many happy days, were thus passed, when, as she was returning, one morning, from her accustomed ramble, she was accosted by a servant-girl with a beautiful child in her arms.

"Will you please, madam, to show me the way out of these woods? I have lost the right path, and my mistress will be anxious about the baby, if I am out any longer."

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Lindsey; "but where do you wish to go, and whose is this darling treasure?" And she stooped to admire and caress it.

"I want to go to Squire Clayton's; this is his grandson, and if any harm should befall him 't would break the old man's heart; he s ts a sight o' store by him."

"Clayton! Clayton!" repeated Mrs. Lindsey; "how

familiar that name sounds ! I wonder if he is any connection of my old schoolmate, Anna. What is your mistress' name, Susan ? for the baby has told me yours !” said she, smiling.

“ Yes, ma'am,” replied she, “ he said ‘ Susy ’ the next thing after he learnt ‘ mamma.’ Dear little Charlie — I love him so dearly ! His mother's name is Mrs. Duncan ; she is feeble, and don't go about much ; but then she bears everything so patiently and sweetly — I think sometimes she an't long for this world. But I am talking too much,” said she, coloring ; “ I always forget myself when talking about her, and you seem so like her that I forgot you was a stranger ; I can find my way now, thanks to you for showing me. Come, Charlie, make a bow to the lady, and say good-by.”

“ I will walk along with you,” said Mrs. Lindsey, laughing heartily at the little “ dude-by,” and bob of the head. “ I am going to ask your mistress to let you bring the baby to my house ; I want my husband to see the sweet little fellow.”

“ I 'm afraid she won't,” replied Susan, much embarrassed, “ for she don't see company, and Charlie is all the comfort she's got. But there she is, walking in the garden and looking for us,” continued she, her agitation evidently increasing as they approached Squire Clayton's mansion.

“ Never fear your mistress' disapprobation,” said Mrs. Lindsey, reading her look ; “ I shall take care to exculpate you from any intention of inviting me here, and will not intrude upon her if I find it disagreeable.”

“ I certainly owe you many apologies for this intrusion,” said Mrs. Lindsey, addressing Mrs. Duncan, who came forward to meet them, “ and should not thus trespass upon your retirement but for that little fellow,” pointing to the baby,

now shouting with delight in his mother's arms. "I accidentally met him and his nurse in the wood yonder, and at her request, as she was somewhat bewildered, I guided them out; the sweet smiles and winning words of little Charlie, as she called him, charming me on to your quiet retreat, to claim from you a promise that to-morrow I may be allowed a visit from him. But," continued she, gazing intently into the lovely face of Mrs. Duncan, "you so strongly remind me of a dear cherished friend who has now gone abroad, that I could almost ——"

"Bessie, Bessie May! can it be?" cried Mrs. Duncan, looking up eagerly, and clasping her arms about her. "O, how I have longed to see you, dear, dear Bessie!" and she drew her to a seat in the arbor.

"But, Anna, dearest, since it *is* you, why did you not write to me when you returned from abroad? You know you promised, and so did Robert, that I should be the first to welcome you home."

"O, Bessie, have you yet to learn that I am not Robert Graham's wife, and that he is wandering *alone* in a foreign land?" replied Anna, in tones of anguish.

"I do remember, now, that Susan told me your name was Mrs. Duncan," said Bessie; "but the surprise and joy of this unexpected meeting had driven it all out of my head. Pray, what does it mean, Anna? for in your pale, sad face I read such suffering as I little thought would fall to the lot of the ever-joyous and lively Anna Clayton. Surely, Robert did not prove false!"

"Robert — never! You know, Bessie, when we were such dear good friends at school, I told you how long Robert and

I had known and loved each other, and that as soon as he got the appointment abroad which he expected, we should together find our home in a distant land. I well remember your query — ‘Are you sure, Anna, that your father will consent?’ — and at the moment it troubled me; but Robert assured me that he knew of his expected appointment, and that a man of honor, like Squire Clayton, would never refuse his consent to our union, when he had so long witnessed, without discouraging, our increasing attachment. Thus reassured, I did not suffer any further doubts to cloud our happiness; but returned home, as you know, full of buoyant anticipations. But, dear Bessie, I forget upon what a long and sad story I have entered; and so selfishly absorbed have I been in my own troubles that I have not even inquired by what conjuration you, whom of all others I have most longed to see, have been brought to my side.”

“I told you just now,” replied Bessie, smiling, “that it was by the witchery of your Charlie’s smiles I was drawn to your door, little thinking, however, that in his mother I should find my dearly-loved and long-cherished schoolmate. But I shall not tell you one word about myself, for I am impatient to hear the rest of your ‘sad story.’ Dear Anna, if you were in trouble, why did you not write and let me come and comfort you?”

“You will know why, dear Bessie,” replied she, “when I have told you all; but the joy of meeting you, and the very thought that I can, without reserve, open to you my hitherto sealed heart, sure of receiving sympathy and kind words, almost overpowers me,” — and tears came to her relief, as she leaned

her head upon her friend's shoulder, and, in broken sentences, continued —

“The kind and loving reception which I met from my parents on my return from school, and the ease and freedom with which Robert was domesticated in our social circle, as though already one of us, served but to brighten our hopes for the future. Judge, then, of my consternation, when one morning, as I sat in the library, with book in hand, but with thoughts busily weaving such scenes of bliss as, alas! can never exist save in imagination, my father came in, and, affectionately patting my cheek, said he was glad to find me there, as he had just parted with a dear friend, and was the bearer of a message for me which he was too happy to deliver. This was none other than an offer of his heart and hand from the noble-born and aristocratic Charles Duncan. ‘Now, my daughter,’ said he, exultingly, as he concluded, ‘I shall live to see my fondest hopes concerning you more than realized. Charles Duncan’s father is an English nobleman, and he will eventually succeed to his father’s titles and estates.’

“‘But, father,’ said I, in tones more of despair than joy at such an announcement, ‘do you not know that this same Charles is a reckless, dissipated fellow, and that he is well aware of our knowledge of his character? Besides, the limited acquaintance we have had with him has only served to expose the shallowness of his brain, as well as the baseness of his heart. I should consider proposals from such a man an insult to any pure-minded, virtuous girl.’

“‘My child, you amaze me!’ replied my father; ‘the attentions you have shown him as our guest led me to suppose that you, at least, respected him. These little follies,

so common to young men of his station, he will soon get over.'

" 'It was only as *your* guest, father, that I have endeavored to show him some respect; for, from the first, I have felt a strange repugnance to him. I *cannot* marry him, dear father!'

"My father sat some moments in silence, his head resting upon both hands, his countenance expressive of great disappointment, while I, almost stupefied by an undefinable presentiment of coming evil, sank upon my knees at his feet, exclaiming, 'Surely, father, you do not wish me to marry one who not only unblushingly boasts of his villany in betraying confiding innocence, but is also an avowed enemy of the religion in which we were nurtured.'

" 'Tut, tut, child!' replied he, hastily, 'what do you know about religion? Mr. Duncan told me, to-day, that, although he is a Catholic, he should never interfere with his wife's religious affairs; and as to his boasting, as you say, I think you have been misinformed. So, come, dry your tears, and prepare to look your best, for he is to dine with us to-day, and desires a "*tête-à-tête*" with you afterwards.'

" 'Then, father,' said I, still kneeling before him, 'I must beg you to inform Mr. Duncan that I cannot grant him an interview, or listen for a moment to his proposals; for my heart already acknowledges a possessor whom I can at once *respect* and love.'

" 'Anna, what do you mean?' replied my father, with much agitation.

" 'I mean, dear father, that with all my heart I love Robert Graham, and *his* wife only can I be without perjuring

my plighted faith,' answered I, scarcely conscious of what I said.

"A gentle knock at the door prevented the reply bursting from my father's lips, and Robert Graham entered just in time to avert the storm of wrath from my head. Gazing with surprise on my kneeling form and the agitated countenances of both, and with ready instinct divining the cause, he, too, knelt before my father, and, with my hand clasped in his own, exclaimed, 'Will you not bless your children?'

"*'Never!'* uttered my father, in tones which struck terror to our hearts, and caused mine, at least, to sink in despair — for well I knew their import. It had been the work of an instant; but in that one moment all our fond hopes had been concentrated, and with a *word* were they thus blighted. O, what a fearful responsibility does a father bring upon himself when he thus hopelessly shuts out the first light of love from the heart of his child!

"I have but an indistinct recollection of the remainder of that morning's interview. I knew that no pleading, earnest as it was, of Robert's, could soften my father's heart or change his determination; and, with many reproaches, he banished him from the house, not, however, without conceding to him the privilege of one last interview with me, after I should become more composed. But, in the wild ravings of delirium ever ringing the changes on the dreadful word '*never*,' Robert was forced to leave me, as the appointment he had received admitted of no delay. He had, as I afterwards learned, incessantly importuned my father to alleviate our doom, by giving him some distant hope. But he was told that I must and *should* forget this youthful fancy, and marry

as my friends wished. Then Robert, in the anguish of his soul, wrote the farewell he could not speak; assuring me of his constancy, and implicitly confiding in mine, though I might be compelled, through inability to avert it, to acquiesce in my impending fate! O, how different was his departure from all that our fond anticipations had pictured! Solitary he sought his distant home, where he had hoped to find his little world of happiness."

"Dear Anna," interrupted Mrs. Lindsey, while her own tears were fast flowing in sympathy with her friend, "this is too painful; I little thought I was awakening remembrances so bitter. Much as I desire to hear the rest of your story, — and that I do most intensely, — I cannot permit my curiosity to cause you so much suffering."

"You are the first and only one, Bessie, to whom I could thus pour out my heart, and perhaps it is wrong to speak of those things even to you; but I feel that it will do me good, and I shall be none the less faithful to my duties because you have helped me bear my burden. How I wish I could ever have you near me!"

"And so you will, for I have come with my dear husband to live in the village yonder, and every day we can see each other. Herbert will be delighted to meet you — he has heard me say so much about you."

"Then you did marry Herbert, whose name caused you to blush so when we were at school! Tell me all about it, Bessie."

"Marry him! Yes, to be sure I did," replied Bessie; "what could I have done without him? for I, too, have had sorrow, Anna, though not like yours. My dear father,

who, you know, was all in all to me, died the very day I became Herbert's wife; and though he fell asleep as sweetly and quietly as an infant, my heart would have been crushed by its bereavement, had it not been for the blessed sympathy of my husband. So tenderly did He, 'whose loving-kindness changeth not,' remove me from my childhood's ever-watchful guide, to the protection of one scarcely less dear or less devoted, I could not murmur at the messenger of mercy who so gently called him home."

"O, Bessie, you were always so hopeful, you could bear trouble better than I," replied Mrs. Duncan, with a sigh.

"Rather say, my dear Anna, that I have been enabled to cast my burden on One who has promised to sustain me; and, though your troubles are more grievous to be borne, yet is He able to sustain you, also. But I must hasten home, for it is nearly dinner-time, and I should be sadly missed at our table, where two of us compose the whole family."

"I cannot let you go, dear Bessie, without a promise that you will return this afternoon," said Mrs. Duncan, as she once more threw her arms around her, "'t is such a luxury to see you, and I have so much more to say and to hear!"

"If not this afternoon, I will come to-morrow morning, Anna," replied Bessie, affectionately kissing her; "be assured I am anxious to hear the rest as soon as you are able to bear the recital, which your pale face admonishes me is not to-day."

CHAPTER V.

“ But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
How soon they find fit instruments of ill ! ”

POPE.

AMONG the hills of Yorkshire, remarkable for their picturesque scenery, there stood a noble mansion, whose magnificent parks and highly-cultivated grounds proclaimed at once the refined taste and opulence of the owner. It was one of those delightful spots so common in England, where each generation, as it hands down to posterity the fruits of its labor, leaves also its own impress in the taste and care bestowed on the inheritance. Most skilfully had the exquisite taste of the former owner of Beechgrove displayed itself, in rendering it one of the most beautiful retreats upon which the eye could rest. Grottoes, fountains, murmuring waters mingling with the songs of rare and costly birds, enchanting the senses almost to satiety, would abruptly terminate in the wildest, grandest scenery of nature's mould,—winding paths shaded by the noble and majestic trees which gave to the place its simple and unpretending name, suddenly revealing on one hand favorite bowers for the fairies' revels, while shudderingly the eye would turn to gaze from the overhanging

precipice on the other side, down the deep, dark ravine into which the waters were madly dashing over its rocky sides. These ever-varying though never-wearying beauties of art and nature combined evinced, as we before said, the exquisite taste of its *former* owner; sorry are we to add that, at the time to which our story relates, it had come into the possession of one who could see nothing in this unique blending of extremes but the oddity of a bachelor uncle, who, having no nearer relations, had made his sister's only child sole heir to his princely fortune, together with the homestead which it had been his life-long business to bring to its present perfection. William Duncan, or Sir William, as he was now called, thus suddenly stepped from comparative obscurity, in Ireland, to the ownership and occupancy of an estate whose beauty he could not appreciate, and whose greatest charm, to his shallow mind, was the rare facilities it afforded for game and the chase. From these employments he was certainly not restrained by any domestic allurements. Lady Duncan, ever weak-minded, was too much engrossed in the *honors* of her unexpected elevation to think or care for the pursuits of either her husband or son. The latter was, therefore, left to follow his own inclination, both in the choice of companions and amusements; nor was he long in developing traits of character which showed but too plainly that, with the recklessness of his father, he also imbibed the puerility of his mother.

Not all the admonitions of Father Bernaldi, their family confessor, nor the remonstrances of his tutor, joined with the entreaties and even threats of parents, could check the impetuosity with which he plunged into every species of dissipa-

tion. With a mind undisciplined, and naturally self-willed, he sought only his own gratification, regardless alike of the proprieties of life or the laws of nature. It was, therefore, no matter of surprise to the good physician, who was summoned to the bedside of Charles Duncan, that he found his constitution shattered, and his whole system enervated. With great assiduity did Dr. Murray set himself to the task of restoring vigor to the body, while the zealous priest was no less indefatigable in his labors to reclaim the heart, and bring him within the pale of holy mother church. The partial success of both was visible, as, after a tedious confinement of three months, he bent his steps, one Sabbath morning, to the chapel to celebrate mass, and bowed his head to receive the sprinkling of holy water from the reverend father's hands.

At the doctor's suggestion, seconded by Father Bernaldi, who was fearful of losing the little influence he had already gained, when Charles should again be able to mingle with former associates, it was decided that he should spend a year or two abroad, in the company and under the guidance of the faithful priest. Together, therefore, they sought the shores of America, with no other object than to while away the time in the manner most conducive to the health and spirits of the heir of Beechgrove.

To a mind that had failed to appreciate the inimitable grandeur and beauty surrounding his own home, the scenery of New England would scarcely seem worthy of a passing notice. Though nature welcomed him in her gayest mood, and smilingly strewed his path with her choicest treasures; though flowers rich and rare bent their lovely forms before

him, and filled his every breath with fragrance; and though the hills — our own glorious New England hills — with their boundless wealth of luxurious foliage, seemed to bow their noble heads, and sent forth their feathered choir to entice him to their forest home, yet was not his spirit attuned to this pure melody, nor his heart fitted to mingle with this simple worship of nature. Far more delightful to him were the sounds of revelry and mirth, and the congeniality he sought dwelt only in the haunts of the pleasure-seeking world. Towards the gay metropolis, therefore, he hastily turned his steps, willingly aided by Father Bernaldi, to whose counsel he listened just so far as it accorded with his own gratification, and who, therefore, felt doubly the need of other watchful eyes than his own to guard the wayward youth.

Having domesticated themselves in the most luxurious apartments they could command in the city of B——, Charles Duncan entered with keen zest into the new scenes of dissipation thus opened before him, and pleasure soon enrolled him among her gayest votaries. Meanwhile, Bernaldi, ever wary and vigilant for the interests of the church he served, had sought the presence of Bishop ——, to whom he was bearer of a letter from his most worshipful reverence the Bishop of York, within whose diocese lived Sir William Duncan. It ran thus :

“In Alphonso Bernaldi, the bearer of this, you will recognize our most faithful emissary, to whom has been intrusted the care of an important though capricious youth. It is our pleasure that you afford him all the aid he needs in the watch and care of this person, that so he may be brought within the most holy church, and his estates be converted to her use and benefit.

HUGH PERCY, *Bishop of York.*”

"And you say this young man is rather headstrong," queried the bishop, as he refolded the letter and filed it among his "important documents."

"Ay, that he is," replied Bernaldi; "he pays but little heed to anything but his own gratification."

"What do you consider the weakest — the most accessible point in his character?" asked the wily bishop.

"Really, sir, he is *altogether* so weak, it is difficult to point out any one deficiency," answered the priest.

The right reverend father sat some moments in deep thought; at length he inquired, "Is he fond of gaming?"

"He is, passionately," replied Bernaldi.

"I have him, then," exultingly exclaimed the bishop, as his keen gray eyes twinkled with delight; "all you have to do is to encourage him in this amusement; I will take care of the rest;" and he rubbed his hands with infinite satisfaction as his guest rose to leave.

"You will find a faithful coadjutor in all your reverence desires," obsequiously added Father Bernaldi; "I will from time to time report to you his progress."

"Do so," said the bishop, as he sat down to arrange his well-conceived plan.

"Where to-night, my young man?" playfully inquired the companion of Charles Duncan, as they rose from the tea-table, and the latter prepared to go out.

"Where? why, wherever fun and frolic reign I shall be sure to go, good father; why do you ask?" carelessly replied Charles.

"Do you never think, Charles, how lonely it must be to sit

here moping over my books till midnight, waiting for you?" said Father Bernaldi, reproachfully.

"Why, you astonish me," exclaimed Charles, incredulously, looking at his companion. "I thought you was the happiest man in the world, with your books, and prayers, and good deeds."

"Well, now, suppose I should confess to you, Charles, that I do sometimes tire of these things, and long to get a little insight into the world of pleasure, — what would you think?"

"Think — why, I should be perfectly delighted just to show you a little of what *I* call pleasure; but," he added, laughingly, "I fear your priestly robes would be sadly out of place where I go to-night."

"Why not, then, lay them aside for one evening?" warily answered the priest.

"What do you mean, my good father-confessor?" replied Charles, with more feeling than Bernaldi thought he possessed; "if it is your intention to play the spy on me, you had better stick to your prayers, for, mind you, I'm not to be dogged about anywhere."

"Pardon me, Charles, nothing was further from my intention than such a course," humbly replied the abashed priest. "It is a weakness, I confess, which I must overcome; but I had a desire to spend this evening with you."

"Come, then, good father, we won't quarrel, and if you will promise *not* to preach to me again for a month; I shall be glad of your company to-night; but, mind you, not a word to the old man about it, or else he might cut off my supplies."

"My word for it, he shall not know anything from me," promptly responded Bernaldi, by whom such a result would be equally deprecated.

The brilliantly-lighted saloon, into which Charles Duncan and his friend were ushered, presented, even at that early hour, a very lively scene. Groups of all classes, from the princely merchant to the meagre-salaried clerk, were collected in various parts of the room, eagerly discussing matters of interest pertaining to their evening's amusement, or earnestly watching at the tables those who had already launched into the tide of luck. Servants, continually passing and repassing, with their tempting displays of delicacies and choice wines, served up in rich glass and massive silver, gave to the whole an air of enjoyment alluring to the uninitiated.

The entrance of the two new comers would not, of course, excite much attention, where so many were coming and going; but a close observer, in glancing around the room, could not fail to notice that a pair of keen black eyes were bent upon them searchingly, and immediately withdrawn, while a preconcerted signal was given to one standing near them. With a careless and somewhat indifferent manner this person approached Charles, and in his blandest tone invited him to join a group just forming around a faro-table. At any other time and place, Charles would have hesitated before mingling with a set of entire strangers; but the invitation, though abrupt, was so courteously extended, and the appearance of the person so perfectly in accordance with his ideas of a *gentleman*, that he at once accepted, and, telling his companion, in a low voice, to seek for his own amusement, he was soon too deeply absorbed in the game to observe what was passing around him.

Other eyes than Mr. Manning's had noticed the searching glance bestowed on them; and no sooner had Charles separated

himself from Father Bernaldi than the latter, gliding cautiously along, found himself vis-a-vis to those small gray eyes, whose peculiar expression he had noted in his morning's interview. So complete was the transformation effected in each other by their assumed disguises, that it required great shrewdness to detect the smooth, fair face and bald head of the reverend bishop, beneath those flowing locks, heavy eyebrows, and patriarchal beard; and no less cunning was evinced in identifying the gay and fashionably-dressed young man of pleasure with the meek and obsequious father-confessor. A scarcely perceptible start, as they passed each other, was the only intimation to Bernaldi that the recognition was mutual.

Warily they threaded their way, stopping to note, with apparent interest, the success of one, or sympathizing with the ill luck of another, till they reached an unoccupied table, where they could overhear, without being seen by the parties near them. Seating themselves and ordering refreshments, with merely the simple courtesy of strangers, the elder of the two was soon seemingly absorbed in the contents of the newspaper before him, while the other, with an ill-concealed attempt at indifference, listened to the conversation near him.

"I say, Manning, what a deuced fine fellow you are!" exclaimed Charles Duncan, as he heaped up his ill-gotten winnings and prepared for a larger stake; "you're the best player I ever see. Come, now, give us another glass, and we'll try it again."

"Really, Mr. Duncan, your remarks are very flattering," replied Mr. Manning, with a sarcastic smile; "allow me the honor of refilling your glass. Gentlemen, here's to the health and prosperity of our new friend!"

Every glass was drained save the speaker's, who quietly replaced his on the table unobserved, the lurking smile betraying his evident satisfaction.

"What say you, Mr. Duncan, to a drive into the country to-morrow, to see some of our rustic beauties?"

"Agreed!" cried the half-drunken Charles. "I declare you *are* the cleverest chap I've met with in this country; let's make up a ruralizing party to-morrow at my expense," continued he, elated with wine and success, "and we'll choose Mr. Manning for our guide."

Their assent was pledged in another glass, when Mr. Manning proposed retiring, that they might be prepared for their next day's excursion. Gently drawing Charles' arm within his own, he quietly led the way through several streets to his apartments at the hotel. The fumes of the wine Charles had so freely imbibed, though still coursing through his brain, did not blind him to the fact that Mr. Manning seemed familiar with his locality. With a half-puzzled air, he exclaimed,

"How the deuce you knew where I lived I cannot imagine; but I've taken quite a fancy to you; so come in and have a little chat over a glass of Madeira."

Mr. Manning did not require a second invitation, and, with graceful ease throwing himself into the proffered seat, he spoke in his most winning tones.

"It is not often my judgment and inclination agree in the choice of friends, but this evening has convinced me that such may be found, and I rejoice that the interest with which you inspired me is mutual. We shall indeed be friends."

Could Charles Duncan have looked into the heart of the

speaker as he uttered so emphatically this prediction, even *he* would have shrunk with disgust from its fulfilment; for, though deeply versed in dissipation and vice, this had been rather the result of a weak intellect, combined with an impulsive nature, than the distillations of a naturally malicious heart. Philip Manning, on the contrary, might justly be compared to a "whited sepulchre," polished externally, pleasing to the eye, captivating to the senses, but within full of uncleanness and pollution.

The reverend father was not ignorant of the peculiar qualifications of the instrument he had employed to decoy his unwary victim; and the supply of means, together with promised future reward, was a sufficient incentive to put in requisition all Philip's consummate art. With ready tact he had at once, as we have seen, ingratiated himself with Charles; and as they now sat sipping their social glass, he adroitly drew from him all he wished to know, both of his past life and future intentions. They parted at a late hour, in the best possible humor with each other. Charles was delighted that in his new *friend* he had also found an agreeable companion for his revels, and Manning was no less pleased that he had such a pliant nature to mould.

It was not till Charles was left alone that he bethought himself of Father Bernaldi. Hastily seizing his hat, and reproaching himself for his neglect, he was about to return to the saloon where he had left him, when he perceived two persons standing in the doorway in earnest conversation, one of whom, at his approach, walked hastily away, and the other, turning towards him, revealed the features of the reverend father.

"You must excuse me," said the unsuspecting Charles, laughing; "I am so used to going and coming alone that I entirely forgot you to-night, — indeed, I almost forgot myself in the fascinating society of my new friend."

"It was just as well," replied the priest; "I found my way without difficulty. But who, pray, has so nearly charmed you out of your own identity?"

"All I know about him, father, is, that he is a perfect gentleman and delightful companion; and that is all I care for."

"Beware, my son, how you mingle with these men of pleasure! I trust you are destined for higher pursuits than those in which you have engaged this evening," solemnly added Father Bernaldi, as he laid aside his borrowed garments.

"You promised not to preach to me again for a month," petulantly exclaimed Charles, "and here you are at it again before we have been in the house half an hour! I suppose the next thing you will be blabbing to the old man!"

"I only warn you for your good," meekly replied Bernaldi.

CHAPTER VI.

“This work requires long time, dissembling looks,
Commixt with undermining actions,
Watching advantages to execute.”

WITH the first beams of the morning sun Philip Manning arose, and, hastily dressing himself, proceeded, with noiseless steps, through a long corridor which led from his dwelling to the apartments occupied by the right-reverend bishop. Giving the usual signal, he was immediately admitted by the prelate himself, and for two hours their low and earnest tones might be heard in eager discourse. At length the door slowly opened, and Philip, after casting a quick, searching glance around, returned by the same passage to his own room, where he completed his morning's toilet with care, and partook of a sumptuous breakfast.

A more experienced observer than Charles Duncan could not have seen the slightest defect in his figure or dress as he emerged from the house, an hour later, to join his companions in the contemplated excursion; but the sinister expression of his eye, and the Judas-like smile playing around his lips, betrayed the villain beneath this elegant exterior.

“Well, Mr. Manning,” said one of the party, as he and Charles approached, “where shall we go to-day? You are

to be the guide, you know; so we have only to follow your directions."

"If I am to lead you to-day," replied Manning, pleasantly smiling, "it shall be wherever you choose to go. I have just heard, by the by, that there is to be a village fair about twenty miles from here. What say you to a peep at the country fairies, and a purchase from some of those plump, white hands?"

"O, by all means let's go to the country fair!" eagerly exclaimed Charles, seconded by the others. And for the fair they started in high spirits, full of glee with their anticipated fun.

"I declare, if there an't old Clayton's carriage!" said Johnson, as they drove into the yard of the only inn the village afforded; "if we catch a sight of his pretty daughter, we shall be well paid for coming, I'll agree."

"Dick, why don't you strike there?" replied Manning; "you're handsome enough to captivate any girl."

"But not Anna Clayton, Manning; Richard Johnson's not the man for that. Besides, she's already spoken for, judging by the sweet looks and smiles she bestows on that handsome fellow who is always at her side."

"You mean Robert Graham," said Morton, contemptuously. "Depend upon it, old Clayton never'll let his daughter marry that poor scamp."

"If he *is* poor," replied Johnson, warmly, "he is the noblest-hearted fellow I know of. If anybody is fit to marry her, it is Robert Graham."

"It seems to me you are quite enlisted in her service,"

laughingly interrupted Manning. "We must assuredly see this paragon of beauty, — eh, Duncan?"

"That we must; and, in the mean time, let's go in and drink to her health," replied Charles.

Great had been the bustle and excitement, particularly among the young folks, in their preparation for this merry-making. Notices had been posted in all the neighboring towns, and the streets of the usually quiet little village were now teeming with life, as they poured in from every side, a gay throng of rustic beaux and belles.

Charles was enraptured with this display of country charms, and eagerly participated in the festive scenes, so new to him; dancing with one, flirting with another, and frolicking with troops of country lasses, in high glee. He had managed, with the help of his friend Manning, to ingratiate himself with Squire Clayton, the wealthiest and most aristocratic man in the whole region, and sued, but in vain, for the hand of his fair daughter, in the dance. To every invitation "engaged" was the smiling answer; and he saw, with evident chagrin, that it was far from being an unwilling reply. Piqued, at length, by her indifference, he sought more willing partners; but the vision of her lovely form, floating gracefully about in the mazes of the dance, seemed to him more beautiful than anything he had ever seen, and stirred within a depth of feeling hitherto unknown to himself.

Happily for Charles, the simple habits of the villagers required no stronger stimulant than their own free, joyous spirits; else his unrestrained fondness for the wine-cup would have lessened the admiration with which Squire Clayton (who, by the by, Manning took care to inform of Charles'

station and fortune) regarded him. The old man was not insensible to the attractions of *titled* wealth, and he looked with surprise upon his daughter's evident aversion to the object of it. Treating it, however, as a girlish freak, he was more assiduous in his own attentions, and, at parting with Charles, gave him a cordial invitation to visit his house whenever it suited his pleasure.

Nothing could have been more in accordance with Charles' wishes, and he resolved to improve to the utmost the opportunity thus afforded him of meeting one whom his heart acknowledged unequalled by any of her sex. Carefully concealing from Father Bernaldi and his friend Manning the new passion thus awakened within him, he quietly sought the mansion of Squire Clayton, where he was received with deferential politeness by the father, and cool indifference by the daughter.

In early childhood Anna Clayton had been bereft of a mother's love and care, though not before she had given promise of rare loveliness, and a gentle, winning, affectionate disposition. The idol of the whole household, she became doubly endeared to her widowed father, who, after the death of his much-loved wife, seemed to exist only for her. Ever worldly-minded and irreligious, he had no source of consolation, in his life-long bereavement, save in the gradually unfolding beauty and grace of his only child. Most lovingly would his eye follow her fairy form, as day after day she tripped lightly off to school, hand in hand with her inseparable and almost only companion, Robert Graham; or, as he sat in his library overlooking the garden, his ear would be regaled with her shouts of merry laughter, as she joyously gambolled with her schoolmate. Thus Anna grew up a

cherished flower, living in the sunlight of her father's love, and, what she prized next, the companionship of the noble, manly Robert, son of a much-valued neighbor.

But not always were her days to glide thus smoothly along. With her expanding intellect, her father was painfully reminded of the insufficiency of the schools in their own village, and the consequent necessity of placing her where she could complete her education, and at the same time acquire those accomplishments so suited to her nature. With many tears did the doting father intrust this, his only treasure, to the care of Mrs. Delafield, a lady of superior mind and literary attainments, who, having lost husband and child, devoted herself with eminent success to the instruction of young ladies. A better selection could not have been made; for, while assiduously striving to improve their minds, she did not forget that the cultivation of the heart was no less essential to the welfare of her pupils. With her humble, fervent piety brightly illumining the path of science, she led them through all its intricacies with the same quiet, gentle cheerfulness, ever pointing upward to the great Source of all knowledge.

The pure and heart-felt devotion of her teacher produced a deep and lasting impression on Anna's susceptible nature; but in vain did that teacher seek its reflection in her heart. While she acknowledged its inestimable value to one like Mrs. Delafield, so bereft of earthly treasures, her *own* little world was so filled with happiness and love, she felt no other want. Weeks, months and years, flew by, each in their turn laying at her feet its tribute of earthly devotion; and her heart was satisfied. What blessing could she crave that was

not already hers? A father's love smoothing every rugged path before her; a patient, loving teacher, cheering her through many a tedious maze; light-hearted, merry companions, with their exhaustless school friendships; and, what must be confessed as prized above all, the ceaseless, unalterable affection of her early schoolmate, Robert Graham, glowing in every line of his oft-repeated letters, and gushing with irresistible tenderness from his lips when they met — were not these sufficient to cast a bright halo around her existence, and satisfy every longing of her heart?

Anna left her home a gay, thoughtless, lovely child, and she returned to that home, after a few years' absence, realizing her father's fondest anticipations, in the perfection of her mind, her exceeding beauty, and the simple purity of her heart.

Such was she, when, mingling with gay and joyous spirits in the rural festivities of a neighboring fair, she first saw Charles Duncan. What wonder that her pure mind shrunk from his proffered hand, or that her indifference should grow into disgust, as his repeated and unwelcome visits at her father's house seemed to have some deeper significance than common courtesy? Her blind, infatuated father saw nothing repulsive in the handsome, wealthy, *aristocratic* young man, but secretly rejoiced in his evident admiration of his lovely daughter. His most sanguine expectations had never led him to imagine her the wife of a titled nobleman, though he doubted not her fitness for such a station; but now that it seemed within her reach, he could scarce contain his joy, or wait with patience the desired consummation. Dazzled with her brilliant prospects, the thought of her heart's wild pleadings

against such a union, if harbored for a moment, returned not again. Thus, when, with elated steps and undisguised satisfaction, he sought his daughter to communicate to her the success of all his hopes, how great was his surprise and chagrin when she avowed, not only her extreme repugnance to the man of his choice, but that her heart was already pledged to one every way worthy of the gift, and that his sanction only was wanting to complete their happiness! Now, for the first time, did the bitterness of his heart vent itself upon her defenceless head, with crushing, overpowering weight, and she fell senseless at his feet. Start not, thou self-condemned father! Seek not to restore the wild throbbings of the heart thou hast well-nigh broken; for already has her life's great trial begun, and its shadow is even now enveloping both her and thyself within its dread embrace.

For many days had Charles absented himself, upon trifling excuses, ere the vigilant Bernaldi became aware that something unusual was absorbing the attention of his charge. Communicating at once his suspicions to the holy father, they were not long in discovering the cause; and great, indeed, was their consternation that their plans should be thus baffled. Frequent and earnest were their remonstrances with Charles, but it only resulted in his greater determination to follow his own way. We must do him the credit to say that his love for the beautiful Anna was the purest feeling ever awakened within him, and for the time checked his profligate course.

Foiled in their effort to convert Charles to their own interests, and his fortune to the disposal of the church, the wily bishop and priest lost no time in consulting the right reverend father from whom they had received their instructions,

and to whom was communicated the most trifling circumstances respecting the whole family of Claytons. What a holy religion, whose curious eyes thus pry with selfish intent into the very secret of our thoughts, and lay open before the greedy, devouring eyes of her hirelings our most cherished home associations!

"We have well considered the whole subject laid before us, and, while deprecating the results, which we doubt not your most faithful efforts were exerted to prevent, we yet see much occasion to advance the interests of our most holy church. We, therefore, advise that you offer no further obstacles to the young man's wishes; but, keeping fully in his confidence, endeavor earnestly to win to the worship of the Blessed Virgin, not only him, but the family you mentioned. Let no efforts be spared to this most desirable end; and, furthermore, suffer no heretic to interfere in your plans, or perform the rites of marriage, should there be occasion."

Such, in part, was the missive received in answer to their own, and their course was now plain as well as pleasant.

"Come, Charles," said Father Bernaldi, cheerfully, the morning after he had received this letter; "you have grown wonderfully selfish lately. With all your professions of attachment to me, you have not even offered to show me your treasure. Come, now, let us visit her to-day, and, if I find her half as beautiful or attractive as you represent, I shall not have the heart to oppose you any longer, even though I shall incur the displeasure of your father."

"Will you promise me, good father," eagerly cried the delighted Charles, "that on these conditions you will lend me your aid in securing the treasure?"

"I promise," replied Bernaldi.

"But I must forewarn you that she does not favor my suit," sadly answered Charles, "and only through her father can I hope for success."

"Faint heart never won fair lady," laughingly replied Bernaldi; "but, if I am to interest myself for you, you must also make me a promise."

"I would promise anything, even to the half of my possessions, to claim the hand of Anna Clayton. What is it?"

"That when you *do* claim that hand, your faithful friend and companion shall bless the nuptial vow," feelingly responded the priest, with well-affected emotion.

"That you shall," said Charles, warmly grasping his hand, "and may that blessed hour be not far distant!"

"Amen!" uttered Bernaldi, with deep feeling.

CHAPTER VII.

“ O ! for a curse upon the cunning priest
Who conjured us together in a yoke
That galls me now ! ”

“ What is wedlock forced but a hell,
An age of discord and continual strife ? ”

BESSIE's tender heart was deeply affected by her interview with her former favorite and schoolmate, and she vainly endeavored, as she turned restlessly upon her couch, to shut out the vision of that pale, sad face, so changed from the light-hearted, joyous Anna of former days.

“ Why is it, Herbert ? ” said she, thoughtfully, as she sat with her husband cosily sipping their cup of coffee the next morning, “ why is it that I am loaded with blessings till my cup of happiness seems almost overflowing, while Anna, the bright and beautiful being of school remembrance, whose radiant existence seemed but the prediction of future joy and life-long happiness, is drooping like a faded flower, sadly wearing away her life, with no ray of light to cheer the future ? ”

“ Why, Bessie,” replied her husband, “ your sleepless night has made you quite poetic, and the question you have so

simply proposed has puzzled wiser heads than yours or mine. But, seriously," continued he, "we cannot doubt that beneath all that suffering there is hidden some wise purpose, which will yet be revealed; and though we cannot fathom that wisdom, we feel assured that 'He doeth all things well.' But come, wife," he added, "I am growing impatient to hear the sequel of the sad tale you told me last night. I am going out to see some of my good people; suppose I call, a few hours hence, at Squire Clayton's; will you be ready to walk home with me?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Bessie; "and I shall be so glad to have you see Anna! She needs just such counsel as you alone can give her."

With ready sympathy, and warm, gushing love, Bessie sought her friend, whom she found reclining on an easy-chair in her own chamber. How surpassingly lovely was that face, lighted up with joy at her entrance! Though sorrow had marked its course in unmistakable lines, it could not efface nature's impress; and the clear, open brow, the deep, liquid blue eye, the inexpressibly sweet mouth, all testified to the beauty implanted there, though now shaded by the sad expression of hopeless suffering.

Bessie grasped warmly the hand extended to welcome her, exclaiming,

"Why, Anna dear, your pale face reproaches me for wearying you yesterday. I ought to have been more considerate."

"No, Bessie," replied she, "you are mistaken if you suppose it has injured me; when you have seen me a little longer you will become accustomed to my weakness."

"But indifferent to it I shall never be," added Bessie, earnestly; "all night long have my thoughts been with you, Anna, and, though I know not yet *all* you have suffered, my heart yearns with inexpressible sympathy to comfort you."

"Dear Bessie, I always loved you at school, but now your dear smiling face and soothing words are as balm to my wounded spirit, and lead me to feel that I may yet be cheerful, though never happy. When I have recalled all the painful scenes through which I have passed since I saw you, you will better know how to counsel me for the future."

"Advice as inexperienced as mine would scarcely profit you, I fear," replied Bessie; "but in my husband you will find not only a warm friend, but a judicious counsellor; and glad will he be if in any way he can alleviate your trials."

"Blessings on you both!" murmured Anna, her eyes filling with tears. "You know not what a relief it affords thus to unveil the secrets of my heart to you, whose sensitive nature responds to every throb of anguish!"

"Did you never see or hear from Robert after he left this country?" asked Bessie, anxious to learn more of her heart's history.

"I will tell you all I know of Robert," said Anna, "for, henceforth, as in the past, my lips and heart will be sealed on that subject. To you, the only one in whose ear I dare breathe his name, I can assert, confident of belief, that the affection of a sister for a long-lost and much-injured brother is not more pure than that I bear to Robert Graham. I tore his image from my heart only when I became a wife; and to me he exists not, save in the far-off regions of dream-land."

"You left off yesterday with Robert's departure," said Bessie. "Tell me what became of you then."

"For many days," continued Anna, "I seemed under the influence of some terrible nightmare—ghostly phantoms flitting around my bed, pointing at me their long, spectral fingers, and hissing, with fearful distinctness, in my ear, '*never!*' while I lay powerless to resist their hideous orgies, trembling and quivering in every fibre. But far more dreadful were the realities of returning consciousness, when, severing every tie that bound the past, my poor, misguided father offered me a sacrifice on the altar of his ambition. During all the preparations for the event, to which they had obtained, I know not how, my forced consent, life to me was a blank, on which I could only see written, in burning characters, the immolation of its victim. The only relief I craved, in this self-sacrifice, was that I might be permitted to spend in solitude the intervening time, rid of the presence of one, now more repulsive than ever, who must soon receive my perjured vows. The groans and tears, struggles and writhings of spirit, in which I passed those weeks, I cannot even now recall without shuddering. But at length I nerved myself for the trial, and went forth at their bidding to take upon me life's great burden.

"As I had requested, no reference had been made to me in their arrangements; and when my father tenderly assisted me into the carriage, and took his place beside me, I had not courage to ask our destination.

"*'We are going to the city,'* said he, as if in answer to my thoughts, and gently taking my hand; '*I thought a little journey would benefit you, and after the ceremony is over*

everything is in readiness to take you wherever you wish. My daughter will find that her obedience has been appreciated, and will not go unrewarded.'

" 'If my father is satisfied,' said I, scarcely daring to trust my voice, 'it is sufficient.'

" 'I trust you will be convinced that in choosing for you I have sought only your own happiness,' added he.

" I could not respond, and we rode in silence till the spires of the distant city, coming in view, reminded him that he had yet a duty to perform.

" 'So liberal and honorable has Charles proved himself in all the preliminaries,' at length said my father, 'that I could not, in common courtesy, refuse the only favor he asked; and the marriage ceremony will be performed by a very dear friend of his, in the chapel where he has worshipped.'

" 'Married by a Catholic priest, in a Catholic church, father?' asked I, incredulously.

" 'What matters it, my daughter,' replied he, evasively, 'who officiates, provided the laws recognize his authority? You do not by this means bind yourself to have any further connection with them; and Charles assures me it is the only concession he will ever ask.'

" 'Be it so,' said I, bitterly; 'but remember, father, the responsibility of this act must rest with you.'

" The scene of that heartless marriage, and the subsequent developments of Charles Duncan's character, I cannot repeat. That he is now a drunken, dissipated profligate, is only too well known. I ought to mention, that after the birth of our dear little Charlie the same farce was again played as at our marriage, and he was christened by a Catholic priest. Sweet

little fellow! his innocent prattle is the only joy to which my heart responds. I forgot to say that just after our marriage I read in a newspaper, that I chanced to find, a notice of the marriage of Robert Graham with some distinguished heiress."

"Anna, you have indeed passed through much suffering," said Bessie, as the former ceased speaking, "and I fear will yet see much more. You mentioned that Mr. Duncan (for I cannot call him your husband) is heir to large estates. Where are they?"

"In England, but he has never informed me particularly about it; he seems to shun any inquiries, and even told me, tauntingly, in one of his drunken turns, that he never intended to have me go there,—that he meant to go back, some day, and marry a great lady."

"Is it possible he can thus abuse you, my poor Anna?" replied Bessie.

"O, I should not dare to tell you one half of the ill treatment I receive from him," said Anna, as the tears coursed down her cheeks. "I have succeeded in getting a partial promise from him that he will leave me and return to his own family. Would he only do so, it would lighten my heart, and I might yet find much comfort in living for dear little Charlie."

"But how does your father endure to see you suffer, knowing, as he must, that he caused the misery?" asked Bessie.

"My poor father now sees and acknowledges his error," replied Anna, "and bitterly does he reproach himself for every pang I bear. His devotion to me and little Charlie is

really affecting. But the poisoned arrow has entered my heart, and will ever leave its sting behind."

"O, that I could lead you, dear Anna, to the antidote for that poison—to that fountain whose waters would assuage your grief, and sweeten every bitter cup that you must drink!" fervently exclaimed Bessie.

"It is in vain, Bessie," replied she, sadly shaking her head. "While in health and happiness I sought for none save earthly treasures; and now I cannot, if I would, look beyond the world I have chosen, hoping to find any comfort.—But you remind me of Mrs. Delafield," continued Anna, anxious to change the subject. "Dear, good woman, she has twice spent her vacation with me since she learned of my unhappy marriage; and such a blessing has she been, not only to me, but to my poor father, that we could scarcely bear to have her return to her school. I hope there is some prospect that she will yet be to me, what she has ever seemed—a *mother*."

"I should rejoice for you, Anna, if that should indeed prove so," replied Bessie. "But I see my husband coming for me, and, though he wishes much to know you, he must call when you are less fatigued. We hope to welcome you into our little home circle as soon as you are able to ride there."

"But before that you will come to see me every day, won't you, Bessie?"

"I don't know about that," said Bessie, smiling and kissing her pale cheek; "but you will see me often enough, I venture."

Droopingly as bends the lily before the storm did the fair

and fragile form of Anna Duncan yield to the blasts of drunken fury with which her husband, in his madness, assailed her. In one of these moods he staggered into her room, about an hour after Bessie's departure. Calmly waiting till his violence had exhausted itself, and reason was once more returning, Anna, with mild though resolute tone, exclaimed, "Charles Duncan, I have suffered this too long already; why do you not keep your promise, and leave me?"

"Leave you, my ducky!" replied he, in maudlin tones; "why, you could n't live without me! I am your husband, you know; every woman loves her husband, — ha, ha, ha! No, I won't leave you, I promise."

Sickened beyond measure, Anna covered her face with both hands to shut out the vision, and large drops trickled down through her wan fingers.

"Come, now, none of that snivelling!" said he, angrily. "You know I hate it, and, what's more, I won't have it! You've done nothing but snivel ever since I knew you. Now, if you don't stop!" said he, shaking his hand, menacingly —

"Charles," interrupted she, drying her tears, "I want you to sit down and calmly listen to me. You have often hinted to me that you are laboring under some embarrassments, which I could, if disposed, relieve."

"Why, to tell you the truth," said he, drawing a chair near her, and brightening up, "I have been pretty hard up lately, and Manning threatens to expose me to the old man if I don't pay up. How the deuce he manages to win, all the time, I don't see, when I used to be the best player."

"Philip Manning has always been your evil genius, Charles," replied Anna.

"Now, stop that talk! Phil's a good fellow; he only wants what belongs to him, and that he shall have, by fair means or foul. I'm not the man to sneak off from doing the thing that's right. If you don't choose to bleed the old codger for me, I shall do it myself—that's all."

"What is your debt to Manning?" faintly asked Anna.

"He's got my I O U's for a plump thousand," returned he, "and he would n't object to a hundred more just like 'em. But I'm afraid the old man 'll cut me off, if he knows it."

"Didn't you tell me your father had written lately for you to come home?" said Anna.

"Yes, he did, if I would go alone, and not return here again. The fact is, he won't acknowledge our marriage; and, to own up, I'm sick of it myself," said the brutish fellow.

"Well, then," replied Anna, nothing daunted by this cold-blooded declaration, "if I will get for you the money to satisfy Mr. Manning's claim, will you leave me, and go back to your father?"

"Not so fast, ducky! You see there are several other little items to be taken care of, such as my wine-bill, &c. &c. A man cannot break up in a hurry; and, besides, you know you would pine yourself to death for me," added he, mockingly.

Unable to conceal her detestation of the man, she hastily left the room to seek little Charlie, whose sweet caresses soon restored her wonted serenity.

"See here," said Charles, following her into the nursery; "I've just thought o' something. If you'll do what you said up stairs, and let me take this little chap, I'll go to-morrow."

Anna started as at a viper's sting, and, clasping her little boy in her arms, exclaimed, "Must you add this insult to the

abuse already heaped upon me? I would rather see this child laid in his grave than live in your polluted presence!"

"I declare! What a good actress you would make!" tauntingly replied he. 'Positively, you would eclipse the divine Ellsler herself. Let the brat go," said he, as the little fellow shrank away from him. "But mind — no more of your stuff, ma'am!" shaking his fist in Anna's face.

The broken-hearted wife retired to her own room, and, throwing herself in hopeless grief upon her bed, wept till her exhausted nature found relief in dreamy forgetfulness.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘The web of our life is of a mingled
Yarn, good and ill together.’”

‘Which is he villain? Let me see his eyes;
That, when I note another man like him,
I may avoid him.’”

SHAKSPEARE.

ANNA’S hopes had not been falsely raised, and she felt that she had yet many comforts left, as she welcomed beneath her father’s roof the dearly-loved teacher of her school-days, now bound by a closer tie. The cheerful piety and heart-felt sympathy with which Mrs. Delafield had soothed Anna in her hours of trial and darkness, during the vacations she had spent at Squire Clayton’s, had only served to cement their affection for each other; and it did not escape the watchful eye of her father that with each separation a deeper shade of sadness seemed to rest upon his daughter. Nor was he long in discovering that it was not wholly for his daughter he so eagerly besought a return of these visits. His own heart throbbed with a new life as it acknowledged the gentle influences of such companionship. With his judgment approving the choice of his heart, he sought the presence of Anna’s teacher, and, with manly, dignified, yet persuasive eloquence, pleaded for a life-long happiness with her. The result has

been already anticipated in the welcome given by Anna to her new step-mother.

For a few months the dove of peace seemed nestling within that happy circle. A tiny, beautiful babe had come among them, to claim a welcome to which all hearts had responded ; and little Charlie's joy knew no bounds when assured, again and again, that the little wee thing in his grandma's lap was really his own little sister, and would by and by be big enough to play with him. The love which then welled up in his baby heart for the little helpless being seemed interwoven with his very existence, and never for a moment, in after life, ceased its devotion.

The sorrowfully reproachful manner with which Mrs. Clayton ever regarded him caused Charles Duncan to shrink as much as possible from her presence. Consequently, he would absent himself for days, and sometimes weeks, till Anna had nearly regained her health, amid the quiet and happiness surrounding her.

To her dear and valued friend Bessie this was a source of unmingled thankfulness ; for her heart was ever yearning with a sister's love, to soothe the sorrows and heal the wounded spirit of one to whom she was so closely bound. Of late the cares of each had interrupted the intercourse that both so highly prized ; for in Bessie's happy home, also, a new life had awakened the joyous echo of a mother's love, and stirred within its very depths the fountain of her exhaustless affection. And with no less tenderness did the happy father breathe a blessing over his first-born, as he clasped to his heart the tiny treasure.

Old Bridget was not so quiet in her demonstrations of joy,

on the advent of this new claimant to her affection and care. "Och, the darlint!" exclaimed she, as she took it from the arms of the nurse and kissed its velvet cheek; "it is n't the likes o' yees these old eyes have looked upon this many a day. Shure but 't is a blessed crayther, the very image of its mother! Arrah, darlint, but ye shall niver know want while these hands can serve yees. And what name will ye christen it with, sir?" said she to the father, who stood smiling at her earnestness.

"Should not the bud receive the name of the flower that bore it?" he asked, turning to the pale face upon the bed. And, receiving a smiling assent, he replied to Bridget, "Her name is Bessie, and, if her life sustains all the sweetness, goodness and purity, bequeathed in that name, then will she indeed be worthy of it."

"May the Blissid Virgin keep and defend her from all harm!" solemnly responded Bridget, not exactly comprehending his reply.

"Hush, Bridget!" sternly replied Mr. Lindsey. "Curse not my child's ear with such blasphemies! Call rather upon one who has *power* to save, and not the miserable substitute your priests offer you!"

"It's not the likes of a poor, ignorant crayther that can rason with your riverence," said Bridget, rising, with offended dignity, to leave the room; "but, with your lave, the big folks yonder have had incense burnt and mass said, and the christening all done as it should be, by the praast, thrue Christians that they are;" and she shut the door with no gentle touch as she returned to her kitchen.

"How strangely infatuated are the poor victims of Popish

delusion!" remarked Mr. Lindsey; "no servant could be kinder, more attached and faithful, than Bridget; and yet, touch her religion, and she forgets everything else in her anger. Surely these priests have a most solemn account to render of their responsibility."

"What she said about Squire Clayton's family, troubles me," said Mrs. Lindsey; "I fear Anna has had some trials with her Catholic husband. Do you know anything about it, nurse?"

"I have heard some reports from there," replied the nurse, "but of very small consequence to you compared to your health. I must positively forbid your talking or thinking any more of them at present. You cannot, if you would, alter the circumstances of your friend. The care of your own health is now your most important duty, and you must keep your thoughts quiet and calm. Excuse me, dear Mrs. Lindsey," continued she, "but you must, for once in your life, be selfish; excluding everything that is not perfectly agreeable and pleasant."

"That is right, good nurse," chimed in Mr. Lindsey; "I am sorry I should have alluded to such an exciting subject, but will try to make amends in future for my indiscretion."

"There have been strange doings at Squire Clayton's, if I am rightly informed," said the nurse to Mr. Lindsey, at the table, that day; "Mr. Duncan came home, two or three days after the birth of their little daughter, and insisted that it should be christened, with great ceremony, in the presence of as many as chose to attend. Fearing the effect of his anger on the health and even life of Mrs. Duncan, should they refuse, Squire Clayton and his wife reluctantly consented to

it, on condition that Anna should be kept in ignorance of the strange proceedings, and molested by neither her husband nor the priest. The news was quickly spread, and many went out of mere curiosity to witness the mumbling prayers, the incense-burning, and the christening performed with solemn mockery, by the well-paid priest. In the afternoon the Catholics assembled in the same room to say mass; no one daring to interpose, lest the maddened husband and his accomplice should revenge themselves by intruding into the sick chamber of Mrs. Duncan."

"This is indeed a strange story!" exclaimed Mr. Lindsey. "I was not aware that the Pope's minions would come with such bold and rapid strides into the very heart of our home circles. I am persuaded that Mr. Duncan is guided by a more powerful motive than self-gratification, in his conduct. He has not sufficient strength of mind or purpose to meet many obstacles, and therefore, in overcoming the united opposition of Squire Clayton and his excellent wife, he must have been urged on by some secret and influential adviser."

"He scarcely ever comes home, now," added she, "except in company with one or two friends, who, many suppose are disguised priests."

"I am grieved to hear such accounts," replied Mr. Lindsey. "My parish visits lead me in other directions, so that I am seldom in that neighborhood, and consequently was not apprised of the state of things there. I greatly fear there is some evil machination on foot, by these emissaries of Satan, to draw the whole of that family into their snares. My wife must not know of this matter further than the unguarded remarks of Bridget informed her."

"I shall endeavor to keep Bridget from the sick room as much as possible," said the nurse, as she rose from the table, "for I have my suspicions that she has been tampered with by these priests; and it might be for their interests, you know, to endanger the life of one who has such an influence on Mrs. Duncan as your wife."

"To what an extent will they not carry their nefarious schemes!" exclaimed Mr. Lindsey, shudderingly; "this matter must be looked into at once, and by the proper authorities."

For once report had not exaggerated, or even attained the truth, as those who witnessed the disgusting details of the artful priest's manœuvring with his willing dupe could testify. When their object had been accomplished, even beyond their most sanguine expectations, Charles Duncan returned in triumph, with the priest who accompanied him, to the very holy father, the Bishop of B——, who, as a reward for his obedient perseverance, gave him absolution for all sins committed, and an indulgence for the future. Weeks glided into months, and still were the nightly scenes of drunken revelry, gambling and debauch, continued, when he was suddenly summoned home by news of the sickness of his father. With the advice of his *friends*, he therefore determined that he would now carry into effect his long-promised separation from his unhappy wife. The deep-laid plot which these friends, in connection with his spiritual advisers at home, were maturing, was as yet unknown to him; or, depraved as he was, he might have shrunk from meeting the truthful gaze of his much-injured wife, or the innocent glances of the sweet children.

A few quiet months in the cheerful society of her beloved step-mother had done much to restore to Anna's cheek the bloom of health; and the ceaseless happiness she derived from watching the rapid progress of little Charlie, or the constantly increasing loveliness of Myrtie, the new pet, had contributed no less to the serenity of her mind.

Mrs. Clayton was gazing from her window, one pleasant afternoon, upon the group under the great tree in the yard. Anna, in her simple loose robe of white, sat upon a stool Charlie brought for her, that she might be within his reach, while he ornamented her rich auburn hair with flowers of every variety of color, every now and then lovingly caressing her,—the baby crowing meanwhile in Susan's arms, who could not refrain a hearty laugh at the grotesque, gypsy-like appearance of her mistress' head-dress,—when, suddenly, with an exclamation of fear, and a blanched cheek, Anna rose hastily and sought the house, followed by Susan and the children. Immediately Charles Duncan alighted from his carriage, and was met at the door by Mrs. Clayton, who sternly bade him enter and explain the object of his visit.

"Why, really, ma'am," exclaimed Charles, attempting to rally himself from the effects of her cold reception, and Anna's evident avoidance, which had not escaped his notice as he approached the house; "really, one would think you were all fleeing from some monster, instead of giving a fitting reception to an honest man, who seeks his wife!"

"And what reception should you consider befitting one like yourself, sir?" demanded she, bitterly and haughtily.

"O come now, don't give us any of your nonsense!"

replied he; "I've come to see my wife. Where is she,—up stairs?" and he rose to ascertain for himself.

'Stay a moment,' said Mrs. Clayton; "she is not there, but I will call her, if it must be."

Anna's face was deadly white as she answered the summons, and entered the presence of her husband.

"You all seem to avoid me," said he, in a softer and more serious tone than was his wont, "and I cannot, in all honesty, say that I am surprised. But, as I have come to bid you farewell, with an assurance that you will never be troubled with my presence again, I trust you will not refuse me the satisfaction of parting in peace."

So unexpected, and wholly unlike himself, were his words and manner, that both his hearers were too much astonished to reply.

"It is even so," continued he. "To-morrow I leave for dear old England, and, as I have been but too often assured of your wishes, it is not my intention ever to return. So, give yourselves up to your rejoicing," added he, with a bitter smile, "for I seek another home and a fairer bride. But let me have one look at the children before I go."

"Surely, Charles," exclaimed the pure-minded wife, "you will take measures for a divorce before you wed another."

"Ha! ha! ha! jealous, as true as I live! I always thought you liked me, in spite of all you said. Come, now, you look so charming, I've a good mind to let the old man die, and stay here with you, you feel so bad about my going away. I know you do—ha! ha! ha! that was capital!"

"You misunderstood me, Charles," replied Anna; "I did not express any wish for you to stay, nor do I feel any. That

you will leave me to enjoy what little peace I can, with my children and friends, is, and has been, my greatest wish. But to trample on the laws of God and man is dreadful."

"Well said, my little preacher," said he, tauntingly, for he was vexed at her reply; "but have you yet to learn that our most holy church can absolve her sons from a marriage contracted with a heretic? I declare, what beauties!" exclaimed he, as Susan brought in the baby, with Charlie clinging to her dress. "Come here, Charlie, and kiss me, for I am going away off," said he, holding out his hand.

"I shan't go near you! — I don't love you, 'cause you are a naughty papa, and I'm glad you're going away!" shouted the little fellow, as he ran out of the room.

"Very well, I see how he has been trained!" and bitterness deep and strong sprang into the heart that had hitherto been merely cold and worldly.

No forced compliments were uttered, and the gates of this Eden closed upon the departure of one who had well-nigh destroyed its happiness; as did those of Paradise shut out the fallen beings who had forfeited all its bliss. Would that it had been, as with them, for ever and ever!

CHAPTER IX.

‘ You Jesuits are strong in a thousand materials — money, credit, intrigue — all carnal weapons ; but you are weak in God.’

MICHELET.

“ Our stratagems
Must branch forth into manifold deceits,
Endless devices, bottomless conclusions.”

Not many miles distant from Beechgrove, surrounded on all sides, save one, by a dense forest, whose impenetrable gloom was never pierced but for deeds of darkness, stood an ancient chateau, once the residence of an unfortunate nobleman, who, wearied and disgusted with life's realities, bequeathed all his noble domains to the church, and sunk himself into the obscurity of a monastic life. This chateau, with the additional appendages of a cloister and chapel, had been occupied several years as a summer residence by the priestly functionaries of the holy mother church, the cloister immuring within its solid walls those who, either by compulsion or choice, crucified themselves to the world in their ascetic occupations.

In a sumptuously furnished room of this princely residence, near a table, on which were scattered various papers and implements for writing, sat two persons in earnest discussion.

At length one of them rose, and, with a gesture of impatience, exclaimed,

"I have done my utmost to persuade him, but he still clings to the hope that that foolish son of his will return; and then — a truce to all we can do!" snapping his fingers.

"One trial more, my good Alphonso," replied the other, familiarly patting his shoulder; "here is the letter which will settle the matter with him, if you manage right."

"Yes, but suppose that good-for-nothing fellow *should* take it into his head to come just in time to betray us?" queried he.

"Get but that writing signed," returned his companion, with decision, "the rest is easily accomplished. Alphonso Bernaldi is not unused to administering medicines to the sick," continued he, significantly.

"It shall be done, holy father," replied Bernaldi, retiring.

The morning sun, with its life-invigorating, soul-inspiring beams, waking anew the joyous notes of the forest songster, and brightening into fresh existence all animate and inanimate nature, tried in vain to cheer with one radiant glance the lonely apartment of sickness and suffering. Its light shone but faintly through the crimson draperies so arranged as to exclude every ray, and barely sufficed to reveal to the mute nurse the different objects within her room.

"Has Charles come?" again echoed, in feeble tones, from the bed.

"Your son has not arrived, and I cannot flatter you with any false hopes of ever seeing him again," replied the nurse, who had received her instructions.

"It must have been a dream, then," tremulously added he, "but I thought Charles came and asked my forgiveness, and we were reconciled. I wish he would come!"

"If all your friends had deserted you as your son has, Sir William, you would have reason to discard them. It is but a poor return for all their kindness and attention to mourn thus for one who does not wish or deserve your notice," answered the cunning Jesuit.

"I don't know but you are right," said he, with a sigh, "but it seems to me one's own son ought to be nearer than strangers."

"Not if that son proves himself utterly heartless and worthless," she replied. "To every good Catholic the interests of his church *ought* to be dearer than all others; and if, in addition to this *obligation*, your own son forsakes you for the company of heretics, and refuses to return to you, how can you excuse yourself to that church which has so tenderly cared for your soul? Rather should you rejoice that the Blessed Virgin will accept your sacrifice, and save you from the horrors of purgatory," added she, devoutly crossing herself.

"If Charles don't come to-day, I will delay no longer," faintly uttered the sick man, as though loth to pronounce the words that would cut off even such a disobedient son from his heritage.

"Even such a delay may prove fatal to your soul," solemnly responded the nurse.

The door was noiselessly unclosed, and, with stealthy steps, as a tiger tracks her prey, did Bernaldi glide to the bedside of his intended victim.

"The morning is bright and clear, my dear Sir William; I trust you feel its effects in renewed strength;" and he took the feeble, emaciated hand within his own, with well-affected interest and concern.

"In truth, good father, I have had but a sorry night of it. The little sleep I got was so disturbed by strange dreams, that I think it has made me weaker than before," replied the invalid.

"I hope you do not allow your mind to be disturbed by the undutiful conduct of your son," said the priest.

"Charles has caused me much trouble, I know; but, if he would come to me now, and cheer what little life I have left, I would forgive all."

"I grieve to find your heart thus clinging to earthly objects," whined Bernaldi. "I hoped, after our conversation yesterday, you would divest yourself of all these attachments, and be fitted to receive the holy sacrament, without which you cannot die in peace."

"*Must* I give up my son?" cried the father, looking earnestly at his confessor.

"Choose ye between your own salvation and your earthly lusts," responded he. "But I had nearly forgotten," he added, taking a letter from his pocket, — "this may help you to a decision."

"Is it from Charles?" Sir William eagerly inquired, as he grasped the letter; "give me my glasses, that I may read myself what he says."

The nurse gently raised his wan and emaciated form, and, supporting him on either side with pillows, sat in silence near him, while with watchful eye and secret satisfaction the

priestly confessor noted each expression of agony as it flitted over the face of his dupe.

"It is enough," at length exclaimed the father, in despair, casting from him the letter, which Bernaldi quickly concealed; "I am ready to give up all now. Go, my good Marguerite, and bring me a reviving draught; and do you, holy father, prepare me for the sacrament, for I feel that I cannot long survive this."

Concealing his exultation, the father-confessor meekly replied,

"Will you now prove your sincerity and devotion to the Blessed Virgin, who thus opens her arms to receive you into her most holy communion, as she will receive the souls of the faithful at last?" As he spoke he drew from his pocket a paper, which he unfolded before the sick man.

"Explain to me once more its contents," said Sir William, waving his hand towards the paper.

"It is, merely, that at Lady Duncan's decease your property shall be kept from those vile heretics to whom your son clings, and devoted to the holy purposes of the only true, the Catholic church," replied the crafty priest.

"Then — I — will — sign — it!" feebly gasped the sufferer, as he sank fainting upon his bed.

"Curse the old fool!" muttered Bernaldi, as all their efforts to restore consciousness seemed for some moments unsuccessful; "a moment later, and it's little I would have done to bring back his worthless life! But I'm not to be foiled thus! I'll have it out of you yet, you miserable old dotard!" and he ground his teeth with ill-concealed vexation.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear lady," said the sycophantic

priest, as Lady Duncan hastily entered the room, startled by the servant's report. "Sir William has only fainted; see, he is already reviving," he added, as, with a deep sigh, the patient slowly unclosed his eyes and gazed around.

At that moment the sound of carriage-wheels approaching through the broad entrance to Beechgrove caught the quick ear of Bernaldi, and caused the blood to leap wildly through his veins. Suppose his prey should be snatched from him at the very moment when his success seemed certain. The thought maddened his brain, as he stepped to the window to conceal his agitation. The sight that met his eye from the court-yard below did not serve to lessen it, and, with a mighty effort to suppress his fury, he said, in a low voice, to Lady Duncan,

"I would speak with you, for a moment, in the ante-room."

"Your son has just arrived," said he, as he closed the door behind him, "and I wish to caution you against sudden or violent agitation on the part of Sir William. Its effects would probably be fatal, after his recent exhaustion. I would suggest that your son's return be kept from him till I have endeavored to prepare his mind for it, which I will do this afternoon."

"Thank you, good father!" replied Lady Duncan, with unwonted feeling, as she hastened to meet her son.

"Remember — eyes and ears open, Marguerite!" whispered Bernaldi, as he passed down the private stairway, and quickly threaded his way to the chateau.

"Deo gratias!" exclaimed the bishop.

"Deo gratias, indeed!" returned Bernaldi, bitterly, all his

restrained passion bursting forth in incoherent words and violent gesticulations.

"For this unseemly conduct you should do heavy penance!" and the bishop spoke sternly to the raving priest.

"And penance I would do, with a good will, but what'll that avail me now?" said Bernaldi. "Here have I labored these four or five years, but to be thwarted at the last moment!"

"But the *reward*, my good Alphonso — the reward is sufficient for even many more years of trial," soothingly added the bishop.

"Why taunt me with that now," retorted the priest, "when all hopes of it must be dashed?"

"Not so fast, my friend," answered his reverence; "though I had no reason to doubt the successful issue of our last plan, I have yet another in reserve, which *must* accomplish our holy object."

"What is it?" Bernaldi asked, brightening.

"First, I will order lunch," said he, ringing a small silver bell; "you need refreshment after your long walk."

The savory and delicious viands spread before them, of which they both heartily partook, had no little influence in raising Bernaldi's spirits; and he exclaimed, as they concluded their repast,

"Now, holy father, we will to business; your excellent wine has restored me to myself, which that infernal old fool had well-nigh driven out of me."

"Let him die and rot in his grave!" impatiently exclaimed the bishop; "we will yet outwit them all!"

"'T would be strange, indeed, if your reverence's wisdom

and experience were not sufficient to outwit a dozen such brainless fellows as Charles Duncan."

"To say nothing of your own shrewdness and cunning, Bernaldi," added the former, laughingly.

"Just give me one more chance, good father, and I defy all the powers above and below to thwart me again!"

"But that does n't include the power of woman, which you know was the cause of your defeat before," sneeringly replied the bishop.

"If ever she or her miserable old father crosses my path again," returned Bernaldi, "let them take heed; for, as I live, they shall feel my vengeance!"

"Right glad am I, Alphonso, to hear you say that; for the plan I have to propose will, if I mistake not, be the greatest torture you could inflict upon those vile heretics."

"Then I'm your man," said the priest. "But what is it?"

The bishop drew nearer his companion, and in a voice scarcely audible, as though fearful that the very walls would hear, unfolded a plot which even the cold-blooded Bernaldi could scarcely listen to without shuddering.

"What say you now, Alphonso?" asked he, as he concluded.

"I say," replied his companion, while a gleam of malicious satisfaction crossed his jesuitical face — "I say that nothing would suit me better, if the thing can be done."

"Our church allows no *ifs* in its service, and least of all should we expect one from you," haughtily answered the bishop.

"Be it so, then, good father; I will do my part to your entire satisfaction, I venture to say."

"If you do, you will most assuredly receive your promised reward," he replied.

"Where am I? where have I been? what have I done?" cried, in piteous tones, the poor sufferer, as consciousness returned, and with it a sense of some deep wrong committed. "Didn't somebody say Charles had come, just as I signed the deed which made him a beggar?"

"No, Sir William," said Marguerite, stepping softly to his bedside, "no one has spoken. You must have had strange dreams to suppose any one wished you to wrong your son. Here is your medicine; it is a little past the time, but I did not like to disturb your sleep to give it to you before."

"Then I have been asleep," said he, looking round confusedly; "I thought Father Bernaldi was here, and made me sign some paper; and then a hideous demon appeared before me, and said I had beggared my boy."

"These dreams indicate a higher fever," said she, as she examined his pulse and then took from a small drawer a potent sleeping-powder, which she mixed with his medicine. "Here, Sir William."

The patient gazed wildly at her, as if half conscious of her treachery, but, without another word, swallowed the draught, and sank back again on his bed.

"That'll do for you, old fellow," whispered she to herself, "till I know what next to do; it is nearly time he should be here."

"Come, now, don't, mother!" petulantly exclaimed Charles,

"I've had fuss and trouble enough, the Lord knows, since I went away!"

"Well," persisted Lady Duncan, "we could have excused anything rather than such a *mésalliance*; your father has never been the same man since the day he heard of it."

"My father was never so fond of me when I was at home!" said he.

"O, well, you know his honor, the honor of the whole family, must be affected by such a course. We had hoped that you would select a lady of noble birth to share your future wealth."

"And it isn't too late now," replied he, carelessly; "a simple *liaison* in America is no hindrance to a marriage here."

"Was that all, Charles? I thought you were really married to that low-born girl."

"And suppose I was, mother? You can't believe I ever had the slightest idea of bringing her here as my wife! You know, as well as I, that the priest can absolve any contract with a heretic. I should have died with the blues if I had n't had something to amuse me there."

"But the children, Charles?"

"Are just the prettiest ones you ever saw," — and there was a little softening about his heart, — "but they will be well taken care of, I know."

"Well, my good Marguerite," said Lady Duncan, as the former entered the room, "how is Sir William now?"

"Sir William is very ill," replied the nurse; "his mind is wandering, and he is evidently much worse."

"Then I will go to him directly," said Charles, rising.

"Alas, sir!" — and Marguerite shook her head, sadly, — "he would not recognize you now. After a few hours of undisturbed rest, which Dr. Murray says is absolutely necessary for him, he may be much better. I will inform you the first moment it is safe for you to see him;" and she withdrew as noiselessly as she had entered.

"Marguerite is a faithful creature," remarked Lady Duncan; "she could not nurse your father more tenderly if he were her own; and she never seems weary with watching him."

"Where did she come from?" asked Charles.

"She was nursing among the nobility, when Father Bernaldi met her, and persuaded her to come to us. I half fancy Dr. Murray don't like her; but I have perfect confidence in her."

"Father Bernaldi!" repeated Charles; "then he is about here now. I have n't seen him since we parted in a miff, and he came off and left me."

"He speaks of you with great affection," replied his mother, "and blames you no more than all your friends do."

"I don't care a farthing for his affection or censure," said Charles, as he rose to go out and survey grounds soon to be his own.

With quick and stealthy steps, Bernaldi was hastening towards Beechgrove, bitter hatred rankling in his heart, and burning for revenge, when he perceived Charles leisurely strolling around, with the air of a lordly possessor. Serpent-like, he glided circuitously through the elysian paths of this home Eden, mingling with its pure fragrance the poisonous exhalations of his own corrupt heart, as he vowed the deepest, deadliest enmity to him who had twice baffled his wicked

designs. Cautiously avoiding observation, he gained the side-door, which to him, was ever accessible, and, rapidly ascending the private stairway, noiselessly entered the room, to which none save himself was admitted.

"How now, Marguerite!" whispered he; "how long has he slept thus?"

"He revived a few moments after you left," replied she, in the same tone; "but I found he was beginning to be troublesome, so I gave him one of your powders, and he has slept ever since."

"Very well, very well; *see that he wakes no more!* I want none of his fancies put into that young villain's head. Remember, the other powder,—a fit of apoplexy, or any such thing, you know, will do," and he nodded most significantly.

"As you say, holy father," replied the heartless nurse.

For more than an hour Charles wandered through scenes familiar to his youth, but now awakening within him a new sense of their grandeur and beauty. With the pure and unsullied glories of nature he had had but little acquaintance, and less sympathy, in his wild career; and, as they now broke upon him in rare and unequalled perfection, he felt an undefined consciousness of his own inferiority. Throwing himself listlessly upon a rustic bench, near which the falling waters were dancing merrily to the notes of the nightingale,—the swelling chorus of the feathered orchestra filling the air with heaven's music,—he exclaimed, thinking aloud:

"'T would be passing strange if a man can't live happily in such a place as this. Give me a few choice companions, and

it's little I care if I never leave it again. Phil Manning shan't be one, though; he's too deep for me; and, besides, he's got enough out of me already."

"Charles, my good fellow, how are you?" cried a voice behind him, as a hand was familiarly laid on his shoulder. "Now will this dull place wake up to life again, I hope;" and Father Bernaldi greeted cordially his former companion.

"I see you have forgotten our indifferent parting," replied Charles; "so you are right welcome, good father."

"I know how to excuse youthful follies and indiscretions," — and the priest assumed one of his blandest smiles, — "though it may be my duty to check them, if possible. But I have a thousand questions to ask you," added he, as he took the proffered seat near Charles.

"To which I shall return only one answer," replied Charles, laughing; "so, don't bother me with any of your foreign remembrances. I've left them all behind me, and now I'm going to take a fresh start in life. If you and I are to be future friends, — for which I am willing enough, — everything pertaining to my life abroad must be forgotten. You understand, eh?"

"I should be dull, indeed," Bernaldi smilingly answered, "not to comprehend your meaning. But just satisfy my curiosity on one or two points, and hereafter my silence is pledged."

Most artfully did he then draw from Charles all the information he wished; and with intense satisfaction he gathered from him the particulars of Charles' farewell visit, which had

so embittered him towards his lovely wife, and given him a momentary desire for revenge.

"There, now," said Charles, as he concluded, "I've told you more than I ever meant to, and blast me if ever I open my lips again about that cursed pale-faced woman!"

But Bernaldi had heard enough to convince him that the dark and daring plot suggested to him a few hours before was feasible, and that Charles himself was the fittest instrument to accomplish it. His eager delight did not escape the notice of Charles, who, however, in his vanity, attributed it to the joy of meeting him again, and who reproached himself for his former suspicions of this faithful friend. With his arm affectionately linked in that of Bernaldi, in restored confidence, they sauntered slowly along, the latter charming him with his unwonted vivacity, and with humorous descriptions of scenes which had occurred during his absence. Thus had they passed a much longer time than either was aware of, when, as they approached the house, they perceived an unusual commotion,—servants, with frightened looks and pale faces, running hither and thither; and Lady Duncan, with blanched cheek and uplifted arms, urging the swift messenger, who dashed out of the yard and out of sight while she was yet speaking.

"My father must be worse!" exclaimed Charles, as he ran, with trembling steps, towards his mother.

"O, master Charles!" cried the usually placid nurse, wringing her hands, in great agitation, as she rushed forth to meet him, "why were you not here when your poor father called so piteously for you? It almost broke my heart to hear him!" And,

“ Before her face her handkerchief she spread,
To hide the flood of tears she did not shed.”

Poor Charles could hear no more, as with rapid strides he passed them, and sank upon his knees at his father's bedside.

“Too late! too late!” murmured he, grasping the cold and lifeless hand, which but a few moments since was stretched forth convulsively, seeking to rest itself upon his head in paternal blessings.

CHAPTER X.

“ But of this be sure,
To do aught good will never be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight.”

MILTON.

BEECHGROVE seemed shrouded with a gloomy pall of darkness. Its late master had been consigned, with great pomp and pageantry, to his last resting-place; and costly masses for the repose of his soul were daily repeated in the churches far and near, to the entire satisfaction of their lucre-loving priests. The necessary forms of law had been duly attended to, and Charles was now the acknowledged possessor of the princely fortune and estates of the late Sir William. Everything wore a mournful aspect in and about the house; even the very birds seemed to nod and whisper to each other in the ominous silence reigning everywhere. Lady Duncan, absorbed in her selfish grief and widow's weeds, gave scarcely a passing thought to aught else; Marguerite, the *tender* nurse, had gone on other missions of mercy, and Charles was wearied with the dull and monotonous life he was forced to lead. Rising early, one morning, he mounted his fleetest horse, and, with a gesture of impatience spurring him on, he checked not his speed till Beechgrove and its surrounding

beauties were left far behind him. His uncurbed spirit could no longer endure the restraint imposed upon him in his own home by the customary forms of mourning, and he determined to break away from them all, and for a few days, at least, enjoy a little of what he called life. His father's death had affected him more than he thought it possible for anything to do, and he was impatient to shake off his gloomy feelings, and mingle again with the gay world.

The region where he now found himself was new to him, and he suffered his noble steed to guide him whithersoever he would, while his own thoughts were busily employed planning future scenes of pleasure. Suddenly a wild shriek rang through the air, and in the same instant came dashing madly on, plunging and rearing with every bound, a splendid white charger, bearing his almost unconscious burden crouching upon his back. Quick as thought Charles leaped from his saddle, and, seizing the bridle-rein, which hung loosely from the charger's neck, he checked him with such violence as brought them all to the ground together. Pale with fear and affright, the lady instantly sprang to her feet, and, soothing the equally terrified animal, saw, to her consternation, that her deliverer had fallen insensible, nearly crushed with the weight of horse and rider, which had both come upon him. Vainly calling, in her terror, for assistance, she flew to a spring near by, and with its cool, refreshing waters laved the brow of him who had so nearly sacrificed his own life in saving hers.

Who that had, the evening previous, seen the proud and haughty Lady Emilie De Vere, the acknowledged belle of the gay season, surrounded with noble suitors, turning from them all with indifference, till in their vexation they pro-

nounced her as heartless as she was beautiful, could have recognized the same being in the earnest, anxious expression of the lovely face, bending over the form of her still unconscious and unknown companion? Little does the aristocratic maiden herself imagine that each wild throb of her heart, as she gazes with intense earnestness upon the handsome features of her heroic preserver, is but the response of a new-born joy hidden within its depths.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed when the welcome sound of advancing horsemen apprised Lady Emilie that assistance was at hand; and, looking up, she joyfully discovered her father and his faithful groom rapidly approaching in pursuit of her. Their vigorous exertions to restore consciousness were soon rewarded by a deep groan from the injured man, who slowly unclosed his eyes, fixed them for a moment upon the fair face near him, and again relapsed into utter oblivion.

"He must have been internally injured," said Lord De Vere, as his daughter concluded her narrative of the sad accident. "It is necessary that he should receive immediate attention. Make all possible haste, John, in getting the carriage, and in the mean time let a surgeon be summoned."

To Ravenswood, the delightful country residence of Lord De Vere, was the still insensible stranger carefully conveyed, and laid upon its softest bed. The powerful and efficient treatment of their family physician soon restored life and animation; and Charles looked around the sumptuous apartment, and upon the strange faces, with a bewildered air.

"It were better for you to make no unnecessary effort," said the physician, mildly, as Charles attempted to rise. "You have been injured, though we scarcely yet know to

what extent, and we may be obliged to detain you as our prisoner for a few days."

Charles rubbed his eyes in amazement; while a vague, indistinct recollection of his recent adventure seemed to dawn slowly upon him.

"Where am I?" at length he asked.

"Under the roof of one who will never be able to repay his debt to you!" exclaimed Lord De Vere, coming forward and taking his hand.

The puzzled look again returned to Charles' face, as he tried to comprehend his lordship's reply.

"Emilie, my daughter," said the latter, opening the door into an adjoining room, "he has revived. Come in; you can better explain than I."

Blushing with maidenly confusion, the usually self-possessed Lady Emilie stepped softly to his side, and timidly uttered her gratitude for her preservation.

Charles was awake now, as the presence of the fair equestrian recalled the whole scene vividly to his mind.

"I have done nothing worthy of your thanks, fair lady," replied he, "though it is sweet to receive them." And he gazed admiringly into the beautiful face of the proud lady.

"We have yet to learn the name of your self-sacrificing hero," said Lord De Vere, with significant glances, to his daughter.

"I trust the confusion of my brain will be a sufficient apology, sir," said Charles, handing him a card.

"Charles Duncan! What, the son of my old friend Sir William, recently deceased?"

"The same, sir," answered Charles.

"Then are you indeed doubly welcome," exclaimed Lord De Vere. "It needs no ceremony to acquaint you with my daughter, Lady Emilie De Vere, as you have already so favorably introduced yourself."

"I see I must, however unwillingly, interpose," said the physician, interrupting them. "But it will be necessary to keep Sir Charles perfectly quiet, for a few days, at least."

"Do you find him seriously injured?" Lord De Vere inquired, with much interest, aside.

"I fear his brain is seriously affected. Indeed, I should not be surprised if he is delirious to-night; rest and quiet are most essential in his case."

"Give him all the attention in your power, doctor. His father was an old friend of mine, and this was his only child. He has been abroad the last few years, and but lately returned; so I have never seen him till now. Strange that we should have met in such a manner!" added Lord De Vere, musingly.

The physician's prediction was fully verified, as Charles lay restlessly moaning upon his bed, all unconscious of the anxious care with which he was tenderly nursed, or the deep interest, but too plainly revealed, with which one watched for his returning reason.

Lord De Vere well knew how futile would be any attempt to oppose or reason with his daughter; and therefore Emilie was, as she had ever been, left to her own guidance. Deserting the gay scenes where she had shone so brilliantly, but for which she had suddenly lost all relish, and assiduously devoting herself to him who had so daringly saved her life, Lady Emilie persuaded herself that she was but exercising the rites

of good English hospitality. Not so thought the sagacious physician, whose keen glance often caused the crimson blush to mantle her cheek with some unwonted emotion. Not so thought her haughty father, as, with increasing solicitude, he saw her cheek grow pale, and her steps less light, save in the presence of their guest.

Lady Emilie was the last to discover that other emotions than gratitude and mere friendship prompted her to forego all her former pleasures, that she might sit by the side, or guide the feeble steps, of the convalescent. When, however, the humiliating truth flashed upon her that she had given her heart unasked, pride came to her rescue, and in a calm, self-possessed manner, she announced to her father, in Charles' presence, that she must fulfil an engagement in the city, and should depart thither immediately. True to her resolution, she very kindly and courteously bade adieu to Charles, and hastened away, that none might see the wild throbbings beneath that *cold exterior*.

"My dear Charles," said Father Bernaldi, a few days after his return to Beechgrove, "you seem gloomy and depressed, and yet you will not confide in an old friend, who, you know, is devoted to your interests and happiness. What can I do for you?"

"To tell you the truth, good father, I don't know what ails me. I'm lonely and miserable, that's all; it's so confounded dull here!"

"But it is in your power to make it more cheerful."

"How?" asked Charles.

"Nothing easier," answered Bernaldi, with a meaning

smile; "would not Beechgrove, and its master too, rejoice in the bright and beautiful presence of a fair and presiding spirit?"

"Speak out plainly, father," said Charles, more pleased than he cared to show; "you talk in riddles."

"I should not wish to offend you, Charles," he answered, meekly, "but your happiness lies so near my heart, 't would be strange, indeed, if aught affecting you escape my notice."

"Well, and what then?" impatiently added Charles.

"Nothing; only, if these faithful eyes and ears do not deceive me, a lady of noble birth, whose hand is coveted by the rich and powerful, would not disdain to become the Eve in this paradise."

"You mean Lady Emilie, I suppose," replied Charles.

"The same," said Bernaldi, keenly eying him.

"She has no other feeling for me than gratitude, I assure you," said Charles, in a tone which conveyed a different hope.

"That is all a delusion, my dear sir; Lady Emilie loves you."

Charles eagerly started from his seat with delight. "Prove that to me, good father, and you shall not lose your reward."

"I *could* give you other proof than my word," returned Bernaldi; "but it would avail you nothing, as you are at present situated."

"I understand you but too well," said Charles, with a sigh; "yet I always supposed the church had power to annul that contract."

"So she has, and to those who are true to her interests

the bishop often grants such absolution; but you must confess you have not been a very devoted follower."

"If you mean," interrupted Charles, "that I have not given money enough, why, set your own price, but get me released from that hateful marriage."

"The bishop only can do that," replied Bernaldi, "and I would advise you to seek him without delay."

Little need had Charles of such advice, for his impetuous nature could bear no suspense; and, as the wary priest rightly divined, he suffered not many days to elapse ere he found himself in the presence of one who held such power over his future destiny. The secrets of that confessional we cannot unveil; but Charles returned to his home in deep thought, and evident agitation. The ordeal he *must* pass was surrounded with difficulties, perhaps impossibilities, which he might never be able to overcome; certain it was, that without his faithful Bernaldi he could do nothing; so, at least, he felt, and rightly too.

"It is, as you say, a perilous undertaking," Bernaldi remarked, after Charles had disclosed to him the conditions upon which alone the bishop would grant his wish; "he might almost as well have refused you at once. And yet, it would be the best thing for you, if you have the courage to brave it through. I scarcely know how to advise you," he added, with a puzzled air, "but of one thing you may be sure; whatever you do, you may command your best friend to the extent of his abilities."

"Thank you a thousand times, most excellent father!" exclaimed Charles; "were it not for my trust in you, I could not for a moment hope for success."

"You see," reasoned Bernaldi, "there is no other way for you to obtain Lady Emilie; for, even had the holy father annulled the marriage, those children would be your legal heirs, and their friends, you may depend, would not be slow in proclaiming it. But, if you just take them into your own care, as you ought, and place them securely within the church, you not only insure their salvation, but all troublesome discoveries by the haughty Lord de Vere will be avoided. I know him too well to believe he would ever consent to give his daughter to one who had stooped to a connection with a low-born heretic. Your desired success can only be gained by their entire ignorance of any such ties. To them those children must be as though they were not; and, when once you have given them to the church, they are no longer yours, and you can say *truly* (should occasion require) that you have neither wife nor child. You understand?"

"Yes," said Charles, hesitatingly, "I see; but you are supposing, all the time, that the thing is accomplished, while my only trouble is how to do it. If I was more sure of Lady Emilie, I believe I should try, with your help; but I can tell you it will be a hard task."

"Perhaps so; but I think we can plan it so that it will not be so difficult as you imagine."

"I'll leave all the planning to you, good father, while I go to Ravenswood; and if Lady Emilie consents to share with me the beauties of Beechgrove, I'd go to the world's end and work impossibilities, rather than lose her."

CHAPTER XI.

“Trained to duplicity and crime, they are daring, unscrupulous, unrelenting ; and, to convert fortunes to their use, they decoy the simple, murder the obnoxious, rob households, torture the intractable, and trust to impenetrable dungeons to conceal those who would witness against them. Thus has Rome perpetuated her wealth and power.”

“I REALLY think, Anna,” said Mrs. Clayton, gazing fondly on her daughter, “that you have yet many years of happiness before you. Your tell-tale face, if not so sunny as when you were my pupil, has of late been growing more cheerful.”

“Who can live beneath the sun’s rays, and not feel their genial influence?” replied Anna, with a loving smile. “Cold, indeed, would be the heart that did not glow and expand in the bright sunshine of a mother’s love — and *such* a mother !” she added, in a low voice of tenderness.

“Bless you, my child !” and a tear dimmed the soft hazel eye ; “it needed not such trials as yours to bind you more closely to my heart. But see — there comes Susan with the baby ; and Charlie is skipping merrily along, as though the world were all flowers and sunshine.”

“God grant it may be to him !” breathed Anna, with a sigh, which was drowned in the noisy glee of the beautiful boy, as he came bounding into his mother’s lap.

"O, mamma!" cried he, "we've been to see Aunt Bessie's baby, and she's most as pretty as my own little sister — not quite, though;" and he shook his head knowingly, as he caught a glimpse of the chubby, dimpled face his little heart worshipped.

"What did Aunt Bessie say to you, Charlie?"

"She seems as fond of the children," said Susan, coming forward, "as if they were her own. I thought she would never stop kissing them. She wished me to tell you, ma'am, that her baby was christened last Sunday, and they call her Anna, for you."

"Dear Bessie!" exclaimed Anna, while the tears gathered as she thought of the wicked farce mumbled over her own children, "she deserves all her blessings."

"That's pretty much what she said about you, ma'am," replied Susan, proudly. "When she was kissing the children she said you deserved such treasures, for the sweetness with which you bore your misfortunes; those are her very words, ma'am."

"My misfortunes, as she terms them," smilingly remarked Anna, turning to Mrs. Clayton, "have seemed much lighter since they were softened by the sympathy of such warm hearts."

"Would that you had found a more *sure* support, dear Anna!" was Mrs. Clayton's only answer.

The two little cherubs had sunk into the dreamless sleep of innocence, while the young mother still kept her watchful vigils near them. Memories of the past, clothed with life,

came thronging with fearful distinctness about her. Shudderingly she gazed, as the dark phantoms, one by one, came flitting by in their startling, life-like reality; and with a shriek she recoiled from the black, fathomless abyss which seemed opening before her. The vision passed away, and naught but the tiny forms of the sweet sleepers met her terrified gaze, as she tremblingly looked around.

“What a frightful dream I have had!” whispered she, as, with an undefined fear of coming evil, she crept softly to the side of her treasures, and nestled them within her own arms. Alas for thee, fond mother! the bitterness of death itself would be sweet in comparison with the anguish that *must* wring thy heart, ere thou wilt learn to seek a stronger arm than thine own for the protection of these defenceless ones!

“Mamma, do see!” cried little Charlie, as he pointed with ecstasy to the still sleeping baby, whose flaxen ringlets were flooded with the morning’s beams, and encircled her fairy brow like a crown of glory. “Isn’t that the way angels look, mamma?”

Anna smiled as she roused from her heavy sleep. “Yes, darling, only little Myrtie is a thousand times more dear; for we can take her in our arms and kiss her, and feel that she belongs to us.”

“But Susan says she don’t belong to us, mamma; she told me yesterday that God only gave us the baby to love and take care of, till he called her back to heaven. Isn’t that too bad, mamma?”

“But Susan is right, dear,” said his mother; and again the dark foreboding of evil fell upon her heart at the possibility of this precious trust being recalled by the Giver.

Susan's gentle knock at the door was quickly answered by the bright boy, who sprang into her arms for his usual morning kiss, but drew back when he saw her face red and swollen with weeping.

"Why, Susan, what has happened?" exclaimed Anna, as the poor girl threw herself into a chair and burst into tears.

"Indeed, ma'am, I have cried all night at the thought of leaving you and the children; but here is a letter I got last night, and my mother is so sick they think she is going to die, and so she has sent for me to go and stay with her while she does live. Indeed, but it's a sore trial to part with you all; and my poor mother, too! I'm afraid she isn't prepared to die."

"O, well," said her mistress, trying to speak cheerfully, "we will hope for the best; your mother may get better soon, and then you will return to us. How soon must you go?"

"That is what troubles me," said Susan. "They wrote that they would have some one waiting for me at the crossing,—which is about six miles from mother's,—when the stage passes there to-morrow. To get there by that time I should have to go part of the way to-day;" and her tears flowed afresh. "Dear little Charlie and the darling baby! how *can* I leave them?" she cried, caressing first one and then the other. "But God will take care of us all, Mrs. Duncan," she added, in her simple faith; "and if it is best for us to be afflicted, we must not complain."

The day wore sadly away. Susan, by her fidelity and devotion to their interests, had won the esteem of all, and

made herself almost indispensable to their comfort. Charlie was loud in his demonstrations of sorrow for her departure, and little Myrtie seemed babyishly inclined to join in the general feeling that they were losing a faithful *friend* as well as servant. Poor Susan could scarcely refrain from continual sobbing, as she made her few simple preparations to leave, now and then stopping to clasp the baby in her arms once more, or joining with tearful eyes in some childish frolic with Charlie.

At length she spoke hesitatingly to Mrs. Clayton, as she sat with the baby in her lap, while Mrs. Duncan was sewing near by, — “I’ve been thinking that I should feel easier if you had some good faithful girl to take my place before I go. These little darlings” — and her lips quivered — “want some one to walk and play with them.”

“I am aware of that,” replied Mrs. Clayton; “but where should we look for one to fill your place, Susan? We cannot trust every one; and, besides, we hope you will return soon.”

“I hope I may,” answered Susan; “but there is a nice girl staying down to Mrs. Carter’s, who would be glad to serve you, even for a short time, as she is poor and needs some help.”

“Who and what is she? Do you know her, Susan?” Mrs. Duncan asked, looking up with interest.

“She can tell you better than I, ma’am, if you would see her. I only know that she had to flee her own country, where she was well off, because she was persecuted so for becoming a Protestant.”

“She was a Catholic, then?”

"Yes, ma'am; and she seems so humble, so good, that Mrs. Carter says it is worth her board to hear her talk."

"Perhaps we had better see her, Anna," said Mrs. Clayton to her daughter; "we cannot tell how long Susan may have to stay and nurse her mother; and you are not able to take care of the children."

"How do you know she would like to come here?" asked Mrs. Duncan.

"Why, because I have met her several times when we've been out walking, and she seems so fond of the children; she said, only yesterday, that I must be the happiest girl in the world with such sweet little treasures to guard. You must excuse me, ma'am; but when I saw her walking along by here this morning, I told her how bad I felt to leave you, and she said, Could n't she serve you till I come back? She would do everything for those darlings, and such a sweet woman as she knew their mother must be."

"She has a smooth tongue, anyhow, I should judge," said Anna, smiling; "but you may go and tell her I would like to see her, and if she impresses me as favorably as she has you, she can remain."

Susan went out, and soon returned with the girl, whom she fortunately met, as she said, just outside the gate. She was a demure-looking person, a little older than Anna had expected to see, but very neat and tidy, and with an air of good breeding seldom found in one of her rank. Both Mrs. Clayton and Anna were sufficiently pleased with her appearance to justify Susan's good opinion.

"Your name, if you please," said Mrs. Duncan.

"Marguerite, at your service, ma'am," she answered, in a pleasant voice.

"Susan was telling me," continued Anna, "that misfortunes had driven you to this country. I should like to know a little of your history."

"Perhaps these will contain all the information you wish," said she, handing her a small package.

Anna glanced over the papers, which she passed to Mrs. Clayton, remarking, as she did so, "You certainly have most ample and creditable testimony for your integrity, as well as religious principles. Would you like to take charge of my little pets during Susan's absence?"

"No service would be more agreeable to me," said Marguerite, as she smilingly beckoned Charlie to her lap.

Susan felt greatly relieved when she resigned her duties into the hands of one, as she believed, every way worthy and capable; and she left the roof which had been such a pleasant home for her, weeping, of course, but with a lighter heart than a few hours before seemed possible.

Marguerite's gentle, unobtrusive manners, her assiduous efforts to please, and her love for the children, which seemed strengthening every day, soon gained the entire confidence of Anna and her mother.

"I do not like to see my mistress bending over her sewing so continually," said she, one day, to Mrs. Clayton. "If she would only allow me to do it for her, I should be so glad!"

The little garment was placed in her hands, and finished with such exquisite skill, that, by her own entreaty, the whole juvenile wardrobe was intrusted to her care, and Anna left

at liberty to breathe more freely the pure air of heaven. To the quiet parsonage did her steps almost daily lead ; and Bessie, too, had reason to rejoice in Marguerite's efficient aid, which thus afforded her many hours of the sweet companionship of her friend.

"I have come to sit with you all the morning," said Anna, one day, as she entered Bessie's cosy breakfast-room ; "so, just prepare yourself for a regular siege, for I told Marguerite to leave the children here on their return from their morning walk. Everything looks so pleasant and cheerful here, I should like to sit down and have one of our old-fashioned chats."

"And have the talk all on your side," added Bessie, laughingly, as she welcomed her.

"No danger of that," returned Anna, "for one half the time, at least, I should have to listen to the praises of a certain model husband."

"And the other half," retorted Bessie, slyly, "would be scarcely sufficient to recount the perfections of two little angels."

"Let's have a truce, now we are even," said Anna, "and I will agree with you that Herbert is a perfect embodiment of everything that is good, pure, and noble."

"And I will say, what I *think*," added Bessie, earnestly, "that Charlie and Myrtie are the loveliest, sweetest cherubs I ever saw, and are worthy of their mother."

Tears trembled in Anna's eyes, as she related to Bessie the frightful vision which had so terrified her the night before Susan's departure, and how foolishly it had affected her ever

since, — the yawning mouth of that dark abyss seeming ever open before her.

“Why, Anna!” exclaimed she, “I did not know you were so superstitious; it was doubtless the effect of unusual fatigue or anxiety. Pray, don’t be so weak as to allow it to trouble you a moment.”

The entrance of Marguerite, with her little charge, effectually put an end to the conversation; but it left an unpleasant impression on Bessie’s mind, which she in vain tried to banish.

“When shall I come for them?” asked Marguerite, as her mistress gently excused her.

“In season to return home to dinner,” replied Anna, closing the door.

“Come, Charlie, now we’ll have a good frolic,” cried she, as she playfully ran around the room, while, with a joyous bound, he caught her, to the screaming delight of his baby companions.

Would that this innocent and happy scene had no dark counterpart, — that as the day had commenced, so it might close, in brightness and peace! But we will not anticipate, save to follow the steps of the perfidious nurse, as she glides stealthily along to a thick copse by the bank of the river.

“Is everything ready?” whispers a hoarse voice.

“Everything, father,” is her response.

“Where are the clothes?”

“Yonder, at the foot of that large tree.”

“Remember, Marguerite, act your part well, on pain of the consequences; be here *precisely* at two, and leave the rest to us.”

"Marguerite is late," said Anna, looking at her watch; "what can have detained her? I think I will walk along and meet her."

"If we cannot persuade you to dine with us," said Mr. Lindsey, who had just come in, "I will take little Myrtie and escort you."

"Thank you, and if you will repeat the favor to your wife this evening, I shall be doubly obliged. Don't forget, Bessie, that you have promised me a few hours to-night."

"A promise so pleasant to fulfil," answered Bessie, "is not likely to be forgotten."

"There is Marguerite, now," said Anna, after they had walked a short distance; "but she is coming in the opposite direction from our house."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Duncan," Marguerite began, as she hastily approached them; "I thought I had sufficient time to gather a few of those bright red berries Master Charlie wanted so much this morning, and so I ran up into the woods for them. I am really very sorry to have troubled you so much, sir," added she, as she took the baby from his arms.

Mr. Lindsey left them, and thoughtfully walked homeward.

"Wife," said he, as they sat down to their dinner, "I wish you would advise your friend to dismiss her new nurse."

"Why, what can you mean, Herbert?" she asked, in surprise; "we all think her a wonderful person."

"I will tell you, Bessie; as I was riding home this morning, over an unfrequented road, I saw two persons earnestly engaged in conversation. The man, I judged, from his enor-

mous whiskers and heavy eyebrows, was disguised ; and his companion was no other than the very meek-eyed nurse who met us just now, and, as an apology for being late, said she had been *to gather berries for Charlie* ! Depend upon it, there is something wrong."

Bessie thought of Anna's dream, and shuddered. "I will warn her this very night," said she.

"Have we kept you long waiting, mother ?" asked Anna, as Mrs. Clayton met her at the door.

"No, dear ; your father was unexpectedly called to the city a few hours ago, and we shall dine by ourselves."

"How lonely it seems without him," said Anna, as they sat at the table, "he is always so punctually in his seat. Will he come back to-night ?"

"I cannot tell ; he received a message, just after you left, saying that a friend of his was supposed to be dying, and he must go to him without delay. It was a person to whom your father is very much attached, and the news agitated him exceedingly."

"Where is Marguerite ?" inquired Mrs. Clayton of the servant who answered the bell.

"I don't know, ma'am ; she has n't been round here all the forenoon."

"I should n't be surprised," said Anna, "if she has gone to get some more of those berries ; she thinks every whim of Charlie's must be gratified."

"Mamma, come play with me !" cried a sweet little voice, as a bright face peered into the room.

"In a moment, Charlie, when I have put on the baby's hood."

"Now, what shall we play?" said his mother, carefully seating the wee thing upon a soft, grassy spot.

"Let me catch you, mamma!" and away she jumped, dodging behind bushes and trees, till, to his infinite delight, the little fellow finally cornered her, and caught her in his plump arms.

"Mamma is tired now!" said she, sitting down under a tree, with the laughing baby in her arms.

Charlie crept slyly along, and down came a crimson shower of berries over both, while a shout of joy behind them proclaimed the author of the mischief.

"O, you rogue!" cried his mother, turning partly round to catch him.

But she suddenly paused, as she perceived an elegant carriage approaching them, and was making a rapid retreat into the house, when her own name was pronounced in gentle tones, but with a voice which froze the very life-blood within her heart. Transfixed with surprise and dismay, she stood like some lifeless statue, speechless and immovable.

"Do not be so alarmed, dear Anna!" said Charles Duncan (for he it was), approaching her. "I could not live without one more look at your sweet face. I have not come to disturb your happiness, but I think we should have a more kindly parting than our last."

"O, Charles!" she cried, at length, "what baseness, what meanness, thus to break your pledge, and destroy all our hopes!"

"Really! So, then, you have *hopes*!" returned he, derisively. "Pray who is the fortunate object of them?"

“Charles, stop!” cried she, with an indignant flush. “I hope for naught save to live and die in peace!”

“Which you never shall!” thundered he, as he seized the little ones, and, with the agility of a cat, sprang into the carriage.

“What can you mean?” screamed she, grasping the wheel, and placing herself before it.

One glance at Charles’ priestly companion in the carriage, the heavy blows of a stout whip-handle mangling those delicate fingers ere they loosed their hold, the pleading voices of the helpless ones mingled with her own piercing shrieks for aid, were the last memories of Anna’s reason.

It was a maniac who sped so swiftly after the fast-receding carriage, rending the air with her unearthly shrieks, until exhausted nature kindly laid her senseless form in the dust. Why, O mother earth, didst thou not open thine arms and receive this stricken one to thy cold bosom? Rather would we lay her within thy dread embrace, than witness the spirit’s awaking to its deathless agony!

CHAPTER XII.

“Awhile she stood
Transformed by grief to marble ; and appeared
Her own pale monument ; but when she breathed
The secret anguish of her wounded soul,
So moving were the plaints, they would have soothed
The stooping falcon to suspend his flight,
And spare his morning prey.”

FENTON'S “MARIANNE.”

Not until he reached the city, and found his friend in perfect health and safety, had Squire Clayton one thought of treachery. Now, however, his suspicions were fully roused, and visions of robbery, and murder even, of which he might be the victim, filled him with apprehension and alarm. Alas ! how did his worst forebodings sink into utter insignificance, as he hurriedly reëntered his own home, and gazed with horror upon that wreck of reason and beauty which lay extended almost lifelessly upon her couch !

O, who can break to him the sad tale of bitter anguish, or dash from his lips the sweet chalice of hopes which tiny hands had raised, filled with life and joy ! None save her whose gentle hand draws him tenderly from this scene of woe, as, with a mighty effort stilling her own grief, she gradually, though fearfully, discloses the dreadful deed which had deso-

lated their happy home. With firmly-set teeth and clenched hands did the grief-stricken father listen to the terrible recital.

"I have done it all!" at length exclaimed he, hoarsely. "I see it now! but, O God, what a fearful retribution!" And the strong man bowed his head and wept, in the bitterness of his soul.

Now, for the first time, did he feel the *power* of those into whose snare he had fallen, bearing with him his own precious child, an unwilling victim. Past scenes, in which he had been but the too willing dupe of arch-deceivers, flashed upon his memory, and daguerreotyped there, with fearful distinctness, his own image, stern, relentless, heeding naught save his accursed ambition, cunningly guided by priestly influence, even to the sacrifice of one dear as life to him, and the desecration of all her holiest affections. All was clear to him now. He had been made, through the machinations of others, the destroyer of his own child. No less bitterly did he curse his own guilt, because he, too, had been the victim of Jesuit intrigue. And those innocent babes, the pride and joy of his life, must they, too, be sacrificed? He dared not trust himself to answer this question; but rushed from his dwelling with every thought centred in one great purpose—that earth should contain no spot to hide those treasures which he would not search for their rescue. Little dreamed the deluded man that, while with frantic zeal he urged his neighbors on in their ceaseless, hopeless search, those Jesuit miscreants were calmly sailing with their innocent prey over the deep blue waters, laughing to scorn his futile attempts; or that inquisitorial bolts and bars could shut forever in Stygian darkness those helpless ones! What drops of anguish fell from his brow as

he listened to the piteous moans of the woe-stricken mother, or heard her piercing shrieks for aid, as she lived over again the horrors of that brutal scene! "Would to God," he cried, in his utter wretchedness, "that reason may never return, to mock, with its terrible truth, my heart-broken child!"

Pale with sorrow and grief stood one beside him, as, with clasped hands uplifted, she replied, "Pray rather that the broken heart may find its healing and rest in one who died for her!" And her face glowed with a heavenly light. The old man gazed upon her almost in awe; but his prayerless heart beat no response, and he turned away and sought the solitude of his chamber, where for days none might witness the secret mighty wrestlings of his newly-awakened soul.

With noiseless step and quivering sympathy, Bessie hovered over the insensible form of the smitten one, soothing, with child-like gentleness, her frantic ravings, or weeping wildly, as those arms were stretched forth in delirious eagerness to clasp the babes, who, alas! may never more know a mother's love, or feel her warm embrace! Dear as Anna had ever been to her, Bessie's heart now yearned with more than a sister's love over her crushed and blighted existence. Long, earnestly, *agonizingly*, did her prayers ascend, that the dove of peace, with healing in its wings, might rest in that stricken heart, filling with sweet hope and trust its first awakening to reason and its own desolation.

"And shure, ma'am, there's bin a jintleman afther yees twice this morning," said Bridget, as Bessie returned to her home, after a long, watchful night by Anna's bedside.

"Did he leave his name, Bridget?" said she, with some surprise.

"He said he wouldn't lave it, as maybees ye didn't remember him; and when I axed him should I call the minister, he turned aboot fornenst me, and said he'd call agin."

"Who can it be?" said Bessie, thoughtfully.

"He's a fine raal jintleman, anyhow," said Bridget.

"Well, I shall know when he comes," said Bessie, as she kissed her baby, and, with a sigh, thought of the joyous ones who, but a few days ago, filled that very room with their music, and were now none knew where, — perhaps moaning their little lives away in piteous cries for the loving mother who had ever soothed all their childish griefs. More closely hugged she her own little nestling, as her tears flowed for the innocent and suffering.

The swollen eye and quivering lip betrayed her agitation, as she rose to greet the stranger, whom Bridget announced as "the jintleman."

One glance at the noble form and handsome features before her sufficed to remind Bessie of early days, and her face brightened with pleasure as she welcomed Robert Graham. But thoughts of *her*, in whose wild delirium *that* name had been uttered with deep and thrilling tenderness, mingled with the loved and lost, saddened her heart, and again gushed her tears for the helpless misery of the loved one's doom.

"You have just left *her* bedside!" said he, in a voice choked with emotion. "Tell me, is there any hope?"

"Such hope as a drowning man might have," replied Bessie, bitterly, "when his escape from a watery grave is but the sure prelude to a living death on a barren shore!"

"Say not so!" — and he shuddered as he spoke; "there

may be yet a gleam of light for her whose whole life should have been one bright sunshine of happiness!"

Bessie shook her head, sadly. "What can now bring joy to the heart thus mercilessly severed?"

"The love of God!" answered he, solemnly.

"How could I," exclaimed she, with emotion, "for one moment seem to question that unfailing source of light, or despair of its power to heal such sorrow? It is the only hope I have for our poor Anna's support, when she becomes conscious of her desolation!"

"May that terrible awakening be softened by infinite love and tenderness!" fervently ejaculated he.

"But," said Bessie, "I have not yet inquired for your welfare. Anna, lying there in hopeless grief, excludes nearly all else from my thoughts."

"I have but little to say of myself," replied he, smiling sadly. "Life had lost for me all its joy when I left these shores; and now that I return loaded with what the world calls wealth, I find it even more desolate than before. Her *happiness* I could have witnessed with thankfulness. But to see her pure, gentle spirit writhing in its agony, is torture almost insupportable!" And tears, which had never fallen for his own sorrows, now coursed each other down his manly cheek, convulsing his whole frame.

O, would some ministering spirit waft the fragrance of that pure tribute, wrung from a noble heart, to the unconscious sufferer, restlessly moaning upon her couch! Would it not awaken an echo in that breast that should bring back life and hope? Encircled by warm hearts, eagerly waiting to lavish their wealth in restoring the light of love to the wandering

eye, *cannot* the past be enshrouded within its own dark grave, and the future filled with happiness and love? Alas, no! for never can that mother's undying love forget.

"Pardon me, Mr. Graham," at length said Bessie, whose nice sense of honor could not be obscured even by her partiality; "pardon me, but such unwonted emotion seems hardly consistent with your position." She paused, as though fearful of the offence her words might give.

"May not a brother mourn for the loved playmate of his childhood, or grieve when some ruthless hand pitilessly blights the bright existence of his cherished sister?" replied he, in a gently reproachful tone. "Even thus do I mourn my poor, ill-fated Anna."

"Forgive me," said Bessie, ingenuously, "for a thought unworthy of your noble nature. As a dear sister she has ever wished to be remembered by you."

"Why should I not, then, claim a brother's right to watch over her joyless path, or try to lift the darkness from her soul?" answered he, eagerly. "I feel assured, my dear Mrs. Lindsey, that you will not misunderstand my feelings in desiring to see and comfort this worse than childless mother."

"I certainly shall not," Bessie replied, quickly; "but there are others whose opinion is of more importance."

"I know of none," said he. "With pure motives, hallowed by the fear of God, I feel that this sacred duty is mine, and the smiles or frowns of the world are alike to me."

"But your wife, Mr. Graham!"

"Wife!" exclaimed he, with surprise; "you surely cannot suppose such a being exists."

"Anna told me you married, soon after you went abroad, one who was rich and beautiful," said Bessie.

"Can it be possible that such falsehood was added to treachery!" cried he. "And she believed it?"

"She could scarcely do otherwise," quoth Bessie, "when the papers announced it to be so. But she ever rejoiced in your happiness, so strangely contrasted with her own unhappy lot."

"Pure, unselfish being!" exclaimed Mr. Graham, "little did she know the utter wretchedness of my lonely life, till beams of celestial radiance pierced the gloom, and filled the desolate heart with light and peace. To Him who hath veiled with his glory the darkness of my own soul would I lead that dear sister; for what but *infinite* love can heal her bleeding heart?"

Bessie listened with admiration to his holy fervor, and, warmly grasping his hand, as he rose to leave, breathed the hope that Anna might yet find her support in the same love.

"Before I go," he said, "may I beg the favor of you, Mrs. Lindsey, that you will repeat my wishes to Mr. Clayton. Tell him that the associations of childhood often restore reason, and that only as a *brother* would I seek to lure back to her eye its wonted light. The rest I leave to you."

"You will find me a willing advocate," replied Bessie.

What death-like stillness reigns within the house so lately echoing the gay laughter and merry gambols of light feet! With pale faces and saddened look do its inmates move noiselessly about, for more than the hush of death is there. Upon a bed whose snowy whiteness scarce rivals the marble hue

of her cheek, — fair, beautiful, fragile as the lily, fit emblem of her purity, — lies the young mother, calling wildly, in her madness, for the lost ones. Bessie, the ever faithful, loving sister, bathes her brow and quietly lulls her to sleep, while prostrate in his agony kneels the form of one seeking strength for this hour of trial.

“Help! help!” shrieks the maniac, stretching forth her arms; “the wretches will tear them away! See! the priest! he’s got them! Mercy! mercy! will none have mercy?” Then, changing to passionate entreaty, she cried, “O, Charles, give me my darlings, and I will be your slave for life! I will kiss the very dust off your feet! Hear their screams — I come! I come!” and the frantic mother would have leaped from the bed to chase the phantoms. Gently, but firmly, grasping her hand, nerved with unnatural strength, Robert soothed, with the tenderness of a mother, her unquiet spirit.

“Come, Anna, dear,” said he, in the familiar tones of childhood, “let us go down to the river and throw in some pebbles to make the water ripple.”

This simple allusion to their childish sports touched a chord in her memory, and, with a half-conscious look, she turned towards him and whispered, “Hush! where is Robert? I thought I heard his voice. I can’t play without him!”

How did the strong heart throb within its narrow bounds at this echo from the voices of the past! But that heart must be closed to all its thronging memories, if he would win back to light the darkened soul; and, with firm and holy purpose, did he daily breathe forth the treasured scenes of early days to the eagerly listening ear. The spell of her youth, wrought by the magic of that familiar voice, was

speedily exorcising the evil spirit, and but for the woe which awaited her return to consciousness Anna's friends would have joyed in their hopes of its restoration. But how shall he, whose unwearied efforts have calmed the frenzied eye, and led the bewildered mind back to the dawn of reason, leave the perfection of his work to others, and go forth in his widowed loneliness? He feels instinctively that he must flee from the recognition of her pure spirit, for his heart hath taught him that he but mocks its truth in his *fraternal* professions. Now that he has endeared himself to the careworn father, the anxious mother, and the faithful Bessie, by his untiring devotion to one who must ever be to him as a sister, shall he remain, to forfeit their respect, and his own too, by betraying the secret of his heart? O, what mighty strivings of spirit are his! what hours of prayerful self-abasement, ere he can yield this *purified* offering as sweet incense to his Maker! But his earnest prayers were not unheeded, and, in a strength greater than his own, he left *her* presence with high and noble resolves.

Now that the strong arm on which the frail flower has leaned is withdrawn, what shall save her from sinking? Joy, yea, joy even to thee, thou bruised reed, for thy Saviour's loving arms are gently encircling thee; and, when thou awakest to the loss of thy earthly treasures, thou wilt find in him such love as, through all thy life's journey, shall sustain its grievous burden.

"If it must be so, Mr. Graham," said Mrs. Clayton, sadly, "I will try to acquiesce; but what will our poor Anna do?"

"All that human love and tenderness can devise," he replied, with deep emotion, "cannot save her from the dreadful shock which awaits her first moments of reason. Only infinite love can soothe the agony of that hour; and if prayers and tears avail aught, she will find a support which all our efforts would be powerless to yield."

"But for you, my dear sir,"—and Mrs. Clayton's voice trembled,— "she might never have been restored to us; and now you do not remain to witness the reward of your efforts."

"Listen to me, my dear Mrs. Clayton, and you will feel that duty, as well as safety, bids me go. I can look back upon no moment of my life in which Anna was not the first object of my love; and when I was sternly driven from her, and barriers deeper than the ocean divided us, she became the lone star on which my soul gazed. It was then I learned that the heart's yearnings for earthly love might have a higher, holier object, and the soul be filled with a purer joy. As a dear sister have I since regarded her; and had I found her a happy wife and mother, I could have claimed a brother's love only, and been content. But seeing her heart broken, desolate, stricken by such sorrow as earth could scarce equal, has unsealed the fountain which I had thought was closed forever; and I go forth, bitterly conscious of my weakness, to wage again the war within my breast. Perhaps, in making this confession, I but teach you to despise me;" and he looked anxiously for her reply.

"Never!" she exclaimed, warmly; "now that I know the depth of your love, I but admire the more your noble conduct."

"You can scarcely imagine the relief your words afford

me," he said, striving to repress his emotion; "for you will not now misunderstand my motives in seeking to restore those lost ones to their mother."

Mrs. Clayton looked up in surprise. — "Every effort has been made, but no trace of them can be found."

"Yet we can scarcely doubt," added he, "that they have been carried to their father's home. So strong is my conviction of this, that to-morrow I set sail for England, and dark indeed must be the spot which can hide them from my vigilance."

"Please, ma'am, there's a girl in the kitchen would like to see you," said the servant who filled the place of the false Marguerite.

"Show her in here," replied Mrs. Clayton. "I must beg you to wait a few moments, Mr. Graham, as I have much to say to you yet."

She had scarcely ceased speaking, when Susan, pale, worn and agitated, entered the room, and threw herself at her feet, exclaiming, "Is she — O, tell me, is my mistress still alive?"

Astonished beyond measure at her appearance, and still more by her anxious inquiry, Mrs. Clayton replied, "Your mistress is alive, Susan; but how came you in this condition?" — pointing to her haggard face and tattered dress.

"'Tis so terrible!" said Susan, shudderingly, — "but they would have starved me to death, if I had n't got away and run here."

"Who do you mean?" asked Mrs. Clayton, still more puzzled.

“Why, Mr. Manning and another man, who sent that letter to get me away from here, but never to see my mother.”

“Tell me about it!” — and Mrs. Clayton was nearly as agitated as Susan, while Mr. Graham listened with eager attention.

“Why, you see, they thought I would n’t let them steal the darlings; and so I would n’t, if they killed me!” and she sobbed aloud.

“Go on, Susan.”

“Well, when I had got to the crossing where the letter said some one would meet me, they carried me away and shut me in a dark room, with nothing but bread and water; — all that did n’t hurt me so much as what I heard them say about my poor mistress.”

“What was that?” asked Mr. Graham, hurriedly.

“Why, after I had been there about a week, I should think, I heard some voices talking loud in the next room. One of them was Mr. Duncan’s, and Mr. Manning’s too, but I did n’t know the others, and Mr. Manning was quarrelling about the price he was to get for carrying me away. And then some one asked how they were going to get the children; and Mr. Duncan said he could fix that easy enough, — that Marguerite was there, and would do as they told her. O, how I did cry when I found out their wicked plan, and that Marguerite was such a bad girl! But I could n’t get away, for they had fastened me in.”

“Did you hear them say what they should do with the children?”

“They said something about a vessel and England, but I

couldn't tell what. I was all the time thinking about those innocent little children, and how it would kill my poor mistress to have them so cruelly stolen away."

"Was that all you heard, Susan? You must remember all you can, for this gentleman is going to try to find them, and perhaps you can help him."

"Well, then, I will try and think," said Susan. "I don't know how long it was afterwards, Mr. Manning came to that house, and the woman asked him how they got along. 'O, nicely,' said he; 'they're half way across the Atlantic now;'—and when she told him not to speak so loud, for fear, I suppose, that I should hear, he laughed louder yet, and said, 'She won't tell any more tales, I guess.' So I knew they meant to kill me, and every day I tried to get away, till yesterday, when the old woman came in to give me some bread and water, I caught her and tied her hands with some strings I made of my clothes, and then ran as fast as I could, when I came up with a wagon, and asked the man to let me ride, and he brought me most here."

"Poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Clayton, "you, too, have suffered, but you shall be tenderly nursed now."

"I am persuaded," at length said Mr. Graham, hastily pacing up and down the room, "that this has been a deep-laid plot, for some dark object; and Susan's sad story makes me more determined to search it out."

CHAPTER XIII.

“Generous as brave,
Affection, kindness, the sweet offices
Of love and duty, were to him as needful
As his daily bread.”

ROGERS.

THE light of a new day was gently stealing within the darkened chamber, revealing in its softened beams the pallid features and wasted form of the unconscious sleeper, and the anxious faces of those who through the still night had kept their silent watch. From that long and quiet sleep will her spirit awake with the light of other days; or, is this but its entrance to immortality? The muffled tread, hushed voices, and throbbing hearts, are but silent witnesses of the hopes and fears which fill each bosom, as they tremblingly await the dreaded crisis. Life and death, struggling each for the victory, seem so nicely balanced, that none may tell which shall triumph. All that medical skill and untiring love can devise has been done, and now in prayerful suspense do they rest their hopes upon the Great Physician, who alone can lift the veil of darkness from her soul, and fill her joyless heart with unmeasured bliss. With cheerful hope and unwavering trust in his mercy, we leave her, to wander forth with one who, intent

on noble deeds, is already dashing o'er ocean's trackless path, towards the English shore. Full of anticipation, he heeds not the fierce lashing of angry waves on the frail vessel ; and when, in her weakness, she yields to the mighty power which naught earthly can control, and lies a helpless, shattered wreck upon the boiling, surging sea, mingled with his thanks for deliverance is the prayer that thus he may not be delayed in his cherished object. As if in answer to this petition, a friendly bark receives and safely conveys him to the land where, in imagination, he has already found the lost babes. He forgets that an influence more potent than royalty itself, and to which he must inevitably yield, meets his first step ; nor does he know that watchful eyes are regarding him with keen interest as he hastens on shore, in his impatient zeal forgetful of all else, save his errand of mercy. Deluded man ! he has yet to learn that priestly despotism, with its thousand argus eyes ever on the alert, will but scoff at his powerless efforts to trace its dark path, or rescue from its iron grasp its chosen victims !

“ The thing is easily enough managed,” said the *very* reverend father to Bernaldi, as they sat together, a few mornings after the arrival of Robert Graham ; — “ from his movements, we may look for him now at any time, and you must remain at Beechgrove to guide that foolish fellow’s tongue, or else, in his blundering way, he may betray us. Beat it into his thick brain, if you can, that he is to be utterly ignorant of everything pertaining to the children, and don’t suffer him to make any remarks whatever. And, another thing, — warn Marguerite.”

"You have given me a hard task," replied Bernaldi. "I had rather undertake anything than to manage Duncan's tongue. But curse me if I don't send that infernal Graham back emptier than he came! I know his mettle, and 't will be rare sport to break it, and teach him to let other folks' business alone." So saying, he left the house, mounted his steed, and was soon gayly pacing along the road which led to Beechgrove. He had gained but half the distance, when, suddenly turning, he perceived a horseman advancing rapidly to overtake him; and one keen glance from under those heavy eyebrows sufficed to reveal to him the well-remembered features of Robert Graham. The Jesuit was himself at once, and courteously awaiting the approach of the stranger, saluted him in his blindest tones.

"I am somewhat fearful," said Robert, returning the salutation, "that I made a wrong turn a few miles back, and should be greatly obliged if you can direct me, by the nearest course, to Beechgrove."

"The obligation will rest upon me," replied Bernaldi; "for, as I am going thither myself, and the ride is somewhat lonely, I shall be thankful for such agreeable company."

"Really!" exclaimed Robert. "Then, perhaps, you know Mr. Duncan."

"It is easy to perceive that you are not an Englishman," quoth Bernaldi, laughing, "or Sir Charles would not be so unceremoniously stript of his title. I know Sir Charles Duncan very well," added he, good-humoredly.

"I meant no offence to Sir Charles," replied Robert; "but we Americans, so simple in our habits, do not easily fall into your aristocratic notions."

"You are from America, then?"

"I have but recently arrived from there."

"And you know Sir Charles?" queried Bernaldi.

"I cannot say I know him personally, having never seen him. Have I the honor of addressing one of his friends?" said Robert, turning towards Bernaldi.

"I am his friend; but Sir Charles is not a person to attract any warmer feeling. Hunting and fishing are about all he cares for, except Lady Emilie."

"And who is she, pray?"

"His affianced bride," said Bernaldi, keenly eying him.

Robert started, changed color, but, fearful of betraying himself too far, said, carelessly,

"Then he is married!"

"Not yet," replied Bernaldi; "but great preparations are making for the event, which, it is said, will speedily take place. Lord De Vere insists upon great pomp and ceremony in the marriage of his only child; and Sir Charles is too well pleased with the beautiful heiress to care for the arrangements. So it is thought the affair will exceed in magnificence nobility itself."

Robert rode on in silence, assuming an indifference he was far from feeling. Shocked beyond the power of expression at the perfidy of the wretch, who dared to add dishonor to the wrongs he had already committed against his pure wife, he scarcely knew what course to pursue. He would gladly confide in his chance companion, and seek counsel of him; but he knew not who or what he might be, and the secret must, therefore, remain locked in his own breast. He was roused from his revery by the voice of Bernaldi, who exclaimed,

"This way, if you please — this is Beechgrove." And, turning their horses' heads, they cantered briskly through a broad avenue, shaded by noble trees, whose luxuriant foliage formed a magnificent arch above them. With a mind at ease, Robert would have revelled in such beauty as everywhere filled his eye; but the pale, wan face of one whose stolen treasures he sought looked forth pleadingly from each shrub and flower, and his heart needed no stronger appeal to urge him on.

The cunning, crafty priest succeeded in impressing upon Charles the necessity of following his instructions implicitly, if he would not be thwarted in his marriage with Lady Emilie; and then, with great affability, presented him to the stranger, who had overtaken him in his ride thither, but whose name he had not yet the pleasure of knowing.

"The simple, untitled name of Robert Graham is all I can boast," replied he, handing each a card; "and, as I have very important business with Sir Charles, I would beg the privilege of a few moments' private conversation."

"If Sir Charles desires, I will retire," said Bernaldi, rising. "But probably Mr. Graham is not aware of our relation to each other."

"No, good father," quoth Charles; "pray be seated. As he is my father-confessor," he added, turning to Robert, "I can have no secrets from him. Your business, therefore, whatever its nature, you need not fear to disclose before him."

Robert hesitated, as the thought flashed upon him that this might be the very priest Anna called upon so loudly in her madness; and, if so, any attempt to *rescue* the children he would probably defeat.

"I see," said Bernaldi, again rising, "that Mr. Graham considers me an intruder, and I will therefore relieve you both of my presence."

"I tell you, Father Bernaldi," impatiently interrupted Charles, "what I just now told Mr. Graham. I have no secrets from you, neither do I wish to have; so I beg you to sit quietly, while Mr. Graham will do me the honor to communicate his business with me."

Thus called upon, Robert felt that he could hesitate no longer; and, turning to the confessor, he said, ingenuously,

"I did prefer to see Sir Charles alone, as I judged, from your remarks by the way, that he had kept one secret, at least, which I would not willingly betray without his consent. But, as he assures me it is not so, and bids me proceed, I will do so. I come to bring you tidings, Sir Charles, of your pure and lovely wife, whom you trampled in the dust, and left shrieking in her wild despair, as you tore from her bosom those helpless babes, and bore them from her sight!"

Robert had risen from his seat, and stood calmly, sternly gazing into Sir Charles' face, as he addressed him. The latter at first assumed a puzzled look; but, as Robert concluded, he exchanged glances with the priest, and both burst into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"I declare," cried Charles, as soon as he could speak, "that's too good to be lost. Ha! ha! ha! Why, bless you, Graham, you're capital at a joke. I have n't heard anything better, these many days. Ha! ha! ha!"

"What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed Robert, looking at him in astonishment and anger. "Is it *her* memory you would insult, or me, her humble advocate?"

"Neither, 'pon my word," said Charles. "But — ha! ha! ha! You must excuse my laughing. What do *you* mean?"

"I should think my words were sufficiently plain to be understood. If not, your own conscience may help explain them," replied Robert, with extreme disgust.

"Ha! ha! ha! — You'll certainly kill me, yet. Pray find out, if you can, good father, what he's up to!"

"If I could see any symptoms of insanity about Mr. Graham," Bernaldi answered, laughing, "'t would be easy to account for his strange words; but, as it is, I am only amused at the ludicrous mistake he has made. Why, my dear sir, to talk about wife and babes to a man just on the eve of getting married, is most laughably absurd! But 't will do very well as a joke, I confess."

"Gentlemen," cried Robert, "you will drive me mad! As sure as there is a God in heaven, your unpardonable hypocrisy will meet a just punishment! If there is any justice in England's laws, you, Sir Charles, shall be made to feel it, and render your terrible account before a higher tribunal than mine!" And he spoke with an earnestness that shook their craven hearts.

"Why, really, Mr. Graham," — and Bernaldi's voice was mild and bland, — "I had no thought you were in earnest, in charging Sir Charles with the horrible crime to which you alluded. Pray, explain yourself further, and we may get some clue that will enable us to assist you, if, indeed, you are seriously in search of such a monster as you described."

Robert gazed into the calm, unruffled face of the speaker with distrust; but the Jesuit eye quailed not as it met his own searching glance.

"You would persuade me, if possible," at length said he, "that I am a dreamer, crossing the ocean on a fool's errand, only to be laughed at here as playing off a good joke. Now, though it can be no news to you, I will tell you *why* I came. A wife and mother the pride of our village, beloved by all save the wretch who called himself her husband, has been despoiled of her treasures by ruffian hands; and their daring plot, so brutally consummated, is traced to you, Sir Charles, and a priestly accomplice! Before God, I charge you with that dark and fearful deed, which will yet be terribly avenged!"

"And who are you, sir," cried Bernaldi, springing to his feet and choking with rage, "that dare thus insult a gentleman! Such language is not to be used with impunity by a low-born fellow like you; and if Sir Charles serves you right, he will put you where you will not be likely to try it again."

"Sir Charles will do nothing of the kind," replied Robert, very coolly. "And you, sir priest, under that smooth and pharisaical face, carry a coward's heart. I fear you not. But, Sir Charles, I have not yet done with you. All your efforts to deceive me are vain. I see the trembling heart beneath your foolish subterfuge, and I now demand of you the whole truth!"

"By what authority, sir?" demanded Charles.

"By the authority of Him who has nerved this arm with strength, and this heart with determination, to defend the helpless and innocent from such inhuman outrages!"

"Young man," interrupted Bernaldi, "I bid you beware the consequences of your violent abuse. If you will insist upon it that Sir Charles (who, by the way, has never been in America) is the person you denounce for stealing his own

children, then search his domains, inquire strictly of all you see, and when you are convinced of your mistake, no apology can be too humble for such conduct." With an offended air he took Charles' arm, and they left the room.

How powerless did Robert now feel, as the taunting words of the priest still rang in his ear, embittering his disappointment! How did he reproach himself, lest he had thwarted his own object by hasty words! To search for the children now, would only subject him to further ridicule; so he would return to his hotel, to devise, if possible, some means to outreach both Sir Charles and his confessor. Sadly he rode through the noble forest, passed the chateau, where, unconsciously, he was the subject of much conversation, and, throwing the bridle-rein loosely upon the horse's neck, he gave himself up to the all-engrossing subject that brought him there. Sir Charles' identity he could not doubt;—that they had assumed ignorance as the easiest way to rid themselves of troublesome inquiries, was also plain to him. How he should now proceed, was a question which required no little wisdom and sagacity.

He had not long to reflect, ere the sound of horses' feet approaching in the same direction caused him to draw in his rein, and turn aside, that the rider might easily pass.

"I have hastened after you," said Bernaldi, "to make some amends for words which I should not have used, had Sir Charles been faithful in the confessional. I find, from what he has told me since we saw you, that you were not mistaken in the person, as I supposed. I knew he had led a light and frivolous life, but to what extent I have only just learned. You will pardon me, I am sure, for defending one whom I

thought innocent ;” and he proffered his hand, in a most conciliatory manner.

“ If it was in ignorance that you sought to deceive me, and not by design, as I supposed, I am bound to receive your apology,” replied Robert ; “ especially if, now that you are enlightened, you will acknowledge the justice of my charges.”

“ The truth is,” said Bernaldi, “ as Sir Charles informs me, he took a fancy to visit America, while we thought him either in France or travelling on the continent ; and, as young men of his cast are apt to do, he formed a strong attachment to a very beautiful girl there, and professed to marry her, though the person employed to perform the ceremony was one of his cronies, and of course the marriage was illegal. Hearing of his father’s illness, and extreme desire to see him, he hastened home just in time to receive his blessing, with an earnest, dying request that he would marry the daughter of a dear friend, whose influence, he trusted, would win him from his wild habits. Had Sir Charles then confided in me, all might have been well ; but, in his new passion for Lady Emilie, he remembered only that no *legal* ties bound him in America, and, therefore, there was no obstacle to his marrying as his father, and now his own heart, desired. He could not, however, so easily forget his two beautiful children ; and, with what object I know not, nor does he himself know, he took them from their mother and conveyed them to France, where they may be educated as becomes his children. All this I have gathered from him since you saw him ; and now that I have made the explanation I thought due to you, I will bid you good-day, with

assurances of regret, on my part, at our misunderstanding this morning."

"Stay, stay!" cried Robert, as Bernaldi turned to leave him. "I must know more about this — when can I see you again?"

"Call at the chateau, yonder, to-morrow, at ten o'clock, and I will be there to meet you."

Surprise and indignation had so wrought upon Robert's mind, during the priest's story, that he had not ventured to reply, lest he should have occasion again to regret his hastiness. This he now felt to have been the wisest course; and he returned to the hotel to prepare at leisure for the morrow's interview, upon which important results depended.

"Gentlemen, I must rely upon your honor!" said Robert, looking earnestly at his companions. "It was my intention yesterday, when I left Sir Charles, to have a public investigation of the matter; but, if you can assist me in finding the children, I care not a farthing for him."

"What we have told you," replied Bishop Percy, very mildly, "is from Sir Charles' own confession. I fully agree with you in condemning his rash act, and am ready to offer you any assistance in my power."

"I wish you both to understand," added Robert, "that I have not a doubt of the validity of their marriage, and shall advise Mrs. Duncan to establish it at once."

"There, Mr. Graham," interrupted Bernaldi, handing him a paper, "I have made out a complete directory for you; so I think you will find no difficulty in tracing them."

"And you are *sure* I shall find them there?" asked Robert.

"We have no reason to doubt it," they both replied. "Sir Charles declares, upon his oath, that he left them in the care of the abbess whose name I have given you, though he did not know that we should inform you. We do it, however, from a sense of justice to the suffering mother, and also to convince you of our own ignorance and blamelessness in the whole transaction."

"I will trust you, then," frankly said Robert, "and shall set forth this very day."

"Not until we have dined together," added the bishop, ringing his bell. "You and our good Bernaldi here must smoke the pipe of peace over a fricassee."

"Nothing easier or pleasanter," rejoined the priest, laughingly.

A more experienced observer might, perhaps, have seen, in their unwonted cordiality and apparent sincerity, some covert design; but, truthful and guileless himself, Robert Graham's suspicions, whatever they might have been, were speedily quieted by their seeming interest in his plans, and evident desire to assist him in their accomplishment.

"I feel that I have wronged you," was his ingenuous confession, when leaving them, "and shall bear the remembrance of your kindness with me in my lonely search."

Then did the hearts of those deceivers bound within them at the success of their duplicity. They had met and duped the one they most feared, and what should now stay their hand from perfecting their own dark purposes?

"I tell you," exclaimed the bishop, bringing down his hand upon the table with an energy that made his companion start,

"I tell you this marriage must be prevented, or yours is a life-long work!"

"Well do I know that," replied Bernaldi; "but how shall we manage? Graham will find out, before long, that he is on the wrong scent, and we may expect him back like a hyena upon us. We ought to have the thing done before that."

"I will think the matter over, and by to-morrow we can be ready to act."

To-morrow! How many lips have uttered that word, which never breathed its existence! To how many has its looked-for light been but darkness,—the grave of their brightest hopes!

"To-morrow," Sir Charles had said to Lady Emilie, "we will sail over the waters of yonder beautiful lake, happy in our mutual love, and each living but in the other's smile."

"To-morrow" saw the fair maiden bending in wild grief over the dripping, lifeless form of her lover; while, with ill-suppressed rage, the thrice-baffled priest gazed on the face of the dead. *The work had been done too soon for him!*

CHAPTER XIV.

“ O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feathered raven! wolfish-ravelling lamb!
Despiséd substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seemest.”

SHAKSPEARE.

“ ANOTHER letter from Robert,” exclaimed Mrs. Clayton, as she entered the parsonage, and seated herself beside its fair mistress.

“ Indeed ! ” replied Bessie, “ and if I may judge from your face, it is not a very sad one, either.”

“ No, he is full of hope,” said Mrs. Clayton; “ but read for yourself,” — and she handed her the letter.

“ I write hastily,” — thus the letter ran, — “ just as I am on the point of starting for France. In my last I told you I had determined to seek an interview with Sir Charles Duncan (as he is styled here), as it seemed to me I could reach his heart, if he had one. The cool and insulting manner in which he received my appeals proved him to be the villain we thought him; and, were it not that he had given his conscience to another’s keeping, all my efforts to trace the lost

ones would have been fruitless. But, thanks, for once, to that system (I cannot call it religion) which places a man's thoughts and actions at the disposal of a mortal like himself, the secrets of his confessional were confided to me by those who would thus screen themselves and their church from his infamous conduct. Had I not a dearer object at heart, I would remain here to expose his villany and perfidy, of which even you do not yet know all. But the pleading tones of a sweet voice, ever sounding in my ear, bid me hasten to restore to the desolated home its light and life. I leave this very hour for France, where, according to minute directions given me by Duncan's confessor, and his holy leader, Bishop Percy, I may learn tidings of those I seek, and perchance bear the precious burden to your arms."

"May God reward such devotion!" cried Bessie, as she concluded. "What a happy life would have been Anna's, with one so noble!"

"But, then," replied Mrs. Clayton, with a sigh, "she might have been satisfied with *earthly* love. Let us not distrust the wisdom of Him who hath led her through such dark paths to his own bright presence, or fear to trust in his hands the lives of those darling ones."

"Blessed be his name," fervently responded Bessie, "that our prayers are answered, and dear Anna's heart filled with holy peace! Will you dare tell her of Robert's success?"

"I fear to excite hopes which may not be realized, and yet I can scarcely refrain from cheering her with such good news," Mrs. Clayton answered.

"But, if Robert *should* return with the children, as he hopes, it would be well to have her prepared for it, as her

feeble, shattered system could not bear another shock, even of joy."

"Well might Bessie say that my poor Anna can bear no more," thought Mrs. Clayton, as she bent, that night, with yearning tenderness, over the shrunken, wasted form which told of grief and suffering, and kissed the pallid brow where still rested the deep traces of great sorrow. But the soul beamed forth with its wonted light, and the eye, though dimmed with tears, no longer wandered in maniacal darkness.

"Pray for me, mother," murmured Anna, with quivering lip; and her own heart mingled with the soft, gentle pleadings of that mother's voice, as she earnestly besought strength and comfort for the sorrowing one. Even in that hour of holy communion did the sweet incense of the stricken heart ascend in blessings to Him who, in blighting her earthly hopes, had filled her soul with heavenly joy and peace.

Days and weeks passed away, and still Anna's step grew more strong, her heart more steadfast, in its new life of faith; and though the cheek paled, and the mother's soul yearned to clasp again its treasures, she yielded without a murmur to her sad and lonely fate. To the parsonage, ever the home of holy, happy thoughts, and to Bessie, whose gentle ministrations and unceasing tenderness had won her spirit back to life, did she daily turn for sweet counsel and sympathy. Life with her was now but a dreary journey, to whose end she looked forward with hope and trust.

"What can have become of Robert?" said Mrs. Clayton, one day, to her husband; "it is three months since we last

heard from him, and he was to write immediately after he got to France,”

“I have had many misgivings about him lately, I confess,” he replied. “Having been so terribly deceived myself, I can have but little faith in those with whom he has to deal.”

“He was so hopeful in his last letter, I was almost tempted to show it to Anna, but thought I would wait till I heard again.”

“It was well you did so,” said the squire; “for, after all, my hopes of his success are very faint.”

“Father,” said Anna, entering the room in great agitation, and handing him an open paper, “read that!”

“What is it? what has happened, my child?” exclaimed Mrs. Clayton, whose thoughts were at once with Robert. Her husband read aloud the paragraph to which Anna had pointed.

“We regret to announce the death, on the 7th ult., of Sir Charles Duncan, only child of the late Sir William, whose sudden and untimely end has caused a deep sensation in many circles. Especially to the noble family with whom he was soon to be united by marriage would we tender our warmest sympathy. That one so young, so full of promise, with a brilliant future before him, should be thus suddenly cut down, is among the mysteries we cannot fathom. The treacherous wave whose wild dash stilled the throbbings of that heart unfolds none of its secrets, and we are left to wonder in silence at its dark deed. We learn that, as Sir Charles has left no will, his immense property will pass into the hands of strangers on the decease of Sir William’s widow.”

For a moment no sound broke the stillness, as he ceased

reading. Anna had sunk into a chair, with her face buried in her hands. She thought not of the dishonor and shame from which death had saved her, nor of the perfidy of the wretch who had not been suffered to perfect his guilt; but the hope which she had almost unconsciously cherished, that her misguided husband would, in some repentant moment, restore the loved ones he had torn from her, was now suddenly destroyed, and she felt that they were indeed lost to her forever.

“My daughter,” exclaimed her father, as if reading her very thoughts, “we will trust in the Lord, that he has gracious purposes to perform. We who have been brought, through these bitter trials, to taste his love, — can we not trust in that love now?”

Anna’s faith brightly shone through those tears, as with uplifted eyes and hands she murmured, “Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.” Simple, sweet, yet earnest trust, wafted by the breath of angels to its source, it will yet return to fill that life with bliss!

The postman’s loud knock, resounding through the quiet house, caused each to start, and Mrs. Clayton hastened to receive from his hands the long-expected letter. Anna gazed with surprise at the eagerness with which her mother, after scanning the foreign stamp, broke the seal, and sat down absorbed in its contents. She turned to her father, but he, too, was watching with interest the face of his wife, to gather from it, if possible, some hope. Suddenly it flashed into her mind that it might be connected with the lost ones, and the blood leaped wildly about her heart as she sprang to her

mother's side and grasped the letter, exclaiming, breathlessly, "Tell me, is it about *them*?"

The mild gray eyes beamed sorrowfully upon her, as Mrs. Clayton quietly replied,

"I have thoughtlessly betrayed what it were best, perhaps, you should not know. — It may be better now to tell her all," added she, turning to her husband.

"I think so," he replied.

"Are they dead?" whispered Anna, in a tone half fearful, half hopeful, as though death might be preferable to their little, joyless lives away from her.

"No, not dead," Mrs. Clayton answered; "but here comes Bessie, — she can tell you better than I."

The quiet, pleasant smile with which Bessie greeted her, reassured Anna, and she felt her spirit grow calm and strong beneath that loving glance.

"Now, Bessie," said she, "I must hear all that you have been concealing from me. Why have I not shared your confidence?" asked she, half reproachfully.

"Simply, dear Anna, because we feared you had not strength to bear such suspense, which might end in disappointment."

"As it has," sighed Mrs. Clayton.

Bessie looked at her inquiringly. — "Go on," said she; "and when you have told all, I will read you the letter I just received."

"Well," said Bessie, taking one of Anna's small, white hands within her own, "I know not whether your heart, dear Anna, felt its influence, but in the wildest hour of your delirium, when hope seemed faintest, one came, strong in

heart and purpose, to redeem you — dear to him as a sister — from the life-long misery which had fallen upon you. In your weakest moments, it was *his* arm that sustained you, — his spirit that breathed the happy scenes of youth into your ear, waking recollections which brought back the wandering mind. His voice alone, as in low and fervent tones it uttered for you the agonizing prayer, would calm your soul to rest. But when returning reason gave hope of your restoration, he left you to our willing, loving hearts, and went forth to trace, and if possible restore, those precious children to you.”

The head which had sunk upon Bessie’s shoulder was now raised in earnest expectation. “Has he — has Robert found them?” she exclaimed. “O, why did you not tell me this before?”

“No, dear, he has not found them, and the fear that you might hope too much from his efforts has kept us silent.”

“But Robert *will* save them!” said she, with energy.

O, how strong is the faith of a loving woman’s heart! Anna had loved Robert Graham, and, though years ago she crushed that feeling, and subdued her love, her perfect *trust* in him had never, for a moment, wavered.

“Robert will doubtless use every possible means to discover them,” replied Bessie; “but they are in the power of men who would not easily yield the prize they had taken such pains to secure.”

“Robert had traced them, as he thought,” added Mrs. Clayton, “to France; but, in a letter the postman brought this morning, he says —”

“Let me read it, mother,” cried Anna, eagerly, as a shade of disappointment settled on her face.

"Come," said Bessie, "you must remember I have not heard a word you have been reading, and am all anxiety to know what Robert says."

"Perhaps you will read it aloud yourself, Bessie," Mrs. Clayton replied; "I had scarcely finished it when you came in, and Mr. Clayton has not yet seen the letter."

"I have been so anxiously watching Anna," said her father. "Does my daughter suffer one doubt to darken her mind?" he asked, looking into her troubled face.

"No, father, I know it is all right, but — O, my children!" and nature would speak through the mother's tears.

Bessie took up the letter, and, hastily wiping her own eyes, began to read:

"I had hoped, ere this, to return to you in the joyful accomplishment of my mission; but I have been to France only to find myself the victim either of treachery, or ill luck. As I wrote you last, I received minute directions from those who professed to know, to the convent where the dear little ones had been carried and placed in charge of its abbess. You may well imagine I lost no time in following these directions; and, sooner than I had thought it possible, the dark walls of St. Barbara were before me. Everything about the convent corresponded so exactly with the notes given me, that my heart beat high with expectation as I entered its gloomy portals, and stood in the presence of the lady superior. My strength and courage well-nigh fled, as she informed me, in answer to my inquiries, that only three days before, the children had been transferred to England, in obedience to Sir Charles' commands. She appeared to sympathize warmly in my disappointment, and wept as I told her of the sufferings

of their mother. With the greatest courtesy she entertained me, and solemnly pronounced over me her 'Benedicite' as I left her, to retrace my steps to England. I go back to Sir Charles, and, if necessary, shall take legal measures to expose him, and force the children from his unnatural protection. God helping me, I will never cease my efforts while there is any hope of saving them."

Bessie ceased reading, with a trembling voice, for even *her* sanguine nature felt the greatest uncertainty of his success. Mrs. Clayton was the first to speak.

"Now that Charles is removed, Robert may find less difficulty than he expects."

"I don't know about that, wife," said her husband, shaking his head; "this whole affair has been conducted with more shrewdness and calculation than Charles ever possessed. There must have been some powerful motive for the commission of such a deed, and his death may only conceal it more effectually."

"Of whose death are you speaking?" asked Bessie, in surprise.

"I had forgotten that you were not in when I read that," said the squire, as he gave her the paper.

What was there in that solemn announcement that caused Bessie's heart to glow with something akin to pleasure? Was it not that, with woman's quick instinct, she saw afar off a light in the dark pathway of the afflicted one,—a light whose radiance, though it could not dispel, would alleviate the bitterness of her life? Whatever were her thoughts, hope again smiled through her tears, as she clasped Anna's hand.

"All *will* come out right at last, dear Anna; only let your faith be unshaken and your heart rest in trustful peace."

CHAPTER XV.

“My heart is firm :

There 's naught within the compass of humanity

But I would dare to do.”

HUNT'S “JULIAN.”

ROBERT GRAHAM paced with impatient step the deck of the noble ship which was fast conveying him back to England. For hours had he kept his unbroken tread, dwelling moodily upon his disappointed hopes and the vague uncertainty before him ; for, though he had written hopefully to the anxious ones at home, his own heart misgave him as to his final success. True, his lip curled with contempt for the miserable being with whom he must contend ; but, after all, might not Sir Charles' position and wealth give him an influence which it would be difficult for him *alone* to contravene ? As this thought pressed upon him, he threw himself into a seat, and buried his face in his hands.

“Thee seems to be in trouble, friend,” said a low voice near him, while a hand was laid gently upon his shoulder ; “is there nothing I can do for thee ?”

Robert looked up in surprise, and met the mild but earnest gaze of one whose benevolent face, broad brim, and drab coat, bespoke his sect. “Perhaps I am intruding,”

continued the latter, "but thy looks interest me, and I would fain be of service to thee."

"Thank you! thank you!" replied Robert, whose heart warmed in that genial smile; "but, so far from being an intrusion, I am really grateful that you have broken up a revery, which, to say the least, was far from being agreeable."

"This, surely, is not the place for unhappy thoughts," said the Quaker, pointing around to the calm blue waters through which they were gliding, with islands of great beauty here and there lending enchantment to the scene.

Robert, who was an enthusiastic admirer of nature, gazed around for a moment with delight, and, turning to his companion, said, with a smile,

"You will scarcely believe, I suppose, that among those who know me best I am often called an enthusiast in my love of nature, while, for hours, I have been passing through such glorious scenes with stoical indifference. How true it is that without a mind at ease our highest enjoyment loses its zest!"

"Verily, thou speakest the truth, friend; but thy clear, open brow betrays no consciousness of wrong that should sadden thy life."

"It would be strange, indeed, my dear sir, if I did not daily find cause for disquiet in my own heart; but just now I am more troubled for others than for myself."

"Perhaps it will be impertinent for me to press thee further," said the Quaker, "but my heart is strangely drawn towards thee, and thy confidence should be sacred."

Robert's nature was not one to resist the kindly influences of such a spirit, and he replied, earnestly, "I feel assured

that confidence in you cannot be misplaced; and, as I am greatly in need of counsel and aid, I will seek both from you."

His ingenuousness touched the heart of the stranger, who grasped his hand, warmly. "Thee shall find that James Lee knows how to be a friend."

"And Robert Graham knows how to be grateful," added he, as he led the way to his state-room, where he could converse more privately.

Had the whole world been given him from which to choose, Robert could scarcely have found one more competent to render the assistance he needed. With a heart filled with the liveliest sympathy for suffering in every form, deepened by his own checkered life of joy and sadness, James Lee seemed peculiarly fitted to enter with all his soul into Anna's sad story and Robert's noble purposes. Having spent several years abroad in accumulating a large fortune, he was no stranger to the wiles of those who seek to propagate their church by every means within their power, and he doubted not Sir Charles had been instigated in his strange course by some Popish ecclesiastic, for covert designs of their own. His wise suggestions and ready sympathy cheered Robert, while his own heart became deeply interested in the fate of the little orphaned children. Perhaps the sweet, though sad, remembrance of a little voice which, in earlier days, lovingly lisped "father" in his ear, added a deeper earnestness to his feelings; for Robert was scarcely more impatient to unravel the mystery than was he. Thus strengthened in his zeal and devotion, Robert's spirits grew light and joyous, and hope

once more brightened his path, as they reached England, and proceeded without delay to seek Sir Charles.

"Nature has doffed her gay attire since I left here," said Robert, as they rode leisurely through woods clad in autumn's sombre hues.

"And assumed one more befitting earth," added his companion, glancing at his own dress.

"Why," asked Robert, "was a love of the beautiful implanted within us, if we are not to gratify it by any unnecessary adornments?"

"Thee should ask thyself that question, Robert," the Quaker replied. "Does the natural pride of the heart need any stimulus from these poor bedizened bodies?"

"Certainly not," said Robert, laughing; "but nature seeks, in its infinite variety of gorgeous colors, to captivate our senses; and why should not we endeavor to make ourselves as attractive as possible?"

"Simply, friend Robert, because we do it for our own glory, while nature points from every tree and flower to the hand that formed its beauty and fashioned its perfections."

"Excellent, my dear sir!" exclaimed Robert. "I am almost tempted to don the drab and beaver, and to turn Quaker myself."

"Perhaps thee would never have cause to repent such a course; but," continued he, with a smile, "a drab coat and beaver hat is not all that is required to make thee a Friend."

"Not if I may judge from the noble examples I have seen," said Robert; "but we are drawing near Beechgrove, the residence of Sir Charles Duncan, and my heart trembles as it fears another disappointment."

"Thee must be content to leave the result with God, when we have done all that He puts into our hearts to do," Mr. Lee answered, though he felt more anxiety than he was willing to disclose.

"How silent and deserted everything appears!" said Robert, as they came in view of the mansion. "Sir Charles must be away; perhaps to meet the children, who could not have arrived here much sooner than we."

"What dark object is that moving so stealthily across the garden, yonder?" asked Mr. Lee, pointing to a figure crouching along in the shadow of the hedge, and finally disappearing in the opposite direction.

"I don't know," said Robert; "the whole place wears a strange look to me."

Death had left his dread imprints around them, and they knew it not; why should there not be a look of strangeness?

"Can we see Sir Charles?" inquired Robert of the staid-looking personage who answered their summons at the door.

"Sir Charles was buried yesterday week," was the reply, in a tone as quiet as though nothing unusual had occurred.

"Buried! Sir Charles dead!" they both exclaimed, in one breath.

"I supposed all the country knew that," was his dry rejoinder.

"But where are —— I mean," said Robert, as a gentle touch from his friend recalled him, "where is Lady Duncan, his mother?"

"My mistress is within," — in the same cold tone.

"Will you, my good man, beg for me a few moments'

interview with your mistress? Tell her my business is of the greatest importance, both to her and myself."

"I will, sir."

"What *can* I do?" said Robert, turning to his friend, as the servant left them to deliver his message.

"Go on," said he; "perhaps thee will find it easier to deal with this woman's heart than with her son's. But I am shocked at his death."

"So am I. Strange that we had not heard of it, though now I remember I have not read a paper for a long time."

"My mistress declines seeing any one," said the servant, giving Robert a slip of paper. "She says that any business you may have with her can be attended to by the person whose name she has written on that paper;" and he held the door, as though quite willing to close it at once.

"Stop one moment, if you please," said Robert; "where is this person to be found?" He started as he glanced at the name. "Is it the priest I saw here with Sir Charles?"

"He was Sir Charles' spiritual adviser," answered the impassive servant, "and my mistress has chosen him to conduct her affairs. He has but just left the house; is there anything more?" he asked, without raising his eyes from the floor.

"Yes, one thing; where does he live?"

"In a chateau, a few miles from here, with our most holy bishop."

"The very same!" exclaimed Robert, as they rode away in the direction of the chateau. "It was he we saw under the garden wall, and doubtless he noticed us too. I know not what to expect now."

"Expect nothing, from such apostates, but lying, deceitful words," his companion answered, with a bitterness which caused Robert to exclaim,

"Why, Mr. Lee, such words sound strangely from you, though in my heart I believe you are right!"

"Forgive me, friend Robert, that I have, in mine anger, so disgraced my peaceable principles; but I tell thee I am more disappointed than I care to confess."

"And it is all for my sake!" said Robert, gratefully. "How can I ever repay you?"

"By teaching me to be more discreet in my speech," answered the Quaker, laughing.

"Do you think this Bernaldi would deceive us about the children?" asked Robert, anxiously.

"If he has any private ends to gain, doubtless he would not hesitate to deceive thee," replied Mr. Lee; "and, from all thou hast told me, I fear he has already done so."

"The thought of treachery crossed my mind many times while talking with the abbess of St. Barbara," added Robert; "but her story seemed so plausible, I could not question it."

"She had, probably, learned her part," said Mr. Lee.

Nothing could have been more natural than the look of surprise with which Bernaldi and his reverend companion greeted Robert, as he entered their library and introduced his friend.

"We thought you were well on your way to America, before this time," graciously remarked the bishop. "To what happy circumstance are we indebted for the pleasure of seeing you again?"

"No very agreeable circumstance, certainly, brought me back to these shores and to your dwelling," answered Robert, coolly; "I have either been misled, or chances are strangely against me."

"Explain yourself, if you please, Mr. Graham."

"An explanation is what *I* seek," returned Robert. "I have been, at your bidding, to St. Barbara, only to be told that the children had been sent back to England, by Sir Charles' order. Now—"

"Is it possible?" they both cried, interrupting him. "Sent back! It is passing strange," continued Bernaldi, "that Sir Charles should have done this without my knowledge."

"But *has* it been done without your knowledge?" asked Robert, earnestly.

"Most certainly, my dear sir! Can you doubt it, after all the efforts I made to discover for you the retreat of his children?"

"Friend," said James Lee, rising and looking sternly in his face, "wilt thou lay thine hand on this book, thy Catholic Bible, and declare, upon its truth, that thou hast no knowledge of Charles Duncan's children?"

The blood mounted high in Bernaldi's face, but he restrained his anger, as he replied, "*Gentlemen* are generally ready to take each other's word without sealing it with an oath; but, as you seem to question mine, I am ready to assure you, in any manner you choose, that I know nothing of them. Does that satisfy you?"

"And thee also, friend?" asked Lee, turning to the bishop.

"I apprehend you are not aware of my position," he haughtily answered; "the church does not allow those whom

she has placed high in authority to be amenable to the laity."

"I asked but a simple question, friend," persisted Lee; "will not thy church suffer thee to say yea or nay?"

"Let it be nay, then, to save further words," replied he.

"Now, Robert," said his friend, "thy course seems to be plainly marked. If these good people cannot assist thee, the law must."

"Of what avail can the law be, now that Sir Charles is dead?" inquired Bernaldi.

"The law can penetrate into many a secret place hidden from our eyes," Lee answered, significantly.

"I should be as rejoiced as yourselves," said Bernaldi, without appearing to notice his meaning, "if these little ones can be found, either with or without the help of law; and I promise you my heartiest sympathy and assistance."

"Would not Lady Duncan know something of them?" asked Robert.

"She does not even know of their existence," replied the priest; "we thought it best not to inform her."

"But she will have to know it, in the division of Sir Charles' property," said Robert.

A peculiar smile flitted over the priest's face. — "I don't know," said he, "that it will be necessary; unless their legitimacy is *proved*, they can have no title to any of his property."

"What can you mean?" cried Robert. "You surely do not question the legality of Sir Charles' marriage!"

"And if *I* do not," warily replied Bernaldi, "others may, and the proof must be clear."

Robert's heart sunk as he thought of Anna's fair name being traduced for such mercenary purposes. The interview was becoming too painful for him, and, with an abrupt, hasty adieu, he left the chateau, and rode silently away by the side of his friend.

CHAPTER XVI.

“There is a heaven yet to rest my soul on
In midst of all unhappiness, which I look on
With the same comfort as a distressed seaman
Afar off views the coast he would enjoy,
When yet the seas do toss his reeling bark
’Twixt hope and danger.”

SHIRLEY.

A GREAT change had come over the household of Squire Clayton. Mercy, gliding silently along by the side of sorrow, had gently distilled her heavenly dew on its bitter path, and subdued the intensity of grief. The humble, chastened spirit of the father, so changed from the shrewd, calculating man of the world that he had been, and the peaceful though saddened expression resting on Anna’s still beautiful face, told of more than earthly sympathy and support. None could doubt the presence of the divine Comforter, as this little group daily knelt around the altar their hearts had raised, or as, Sabbath after Sabbath, their long-neglected pew in the village church was filled with earnest, prayerful hearers.

From her first knowledge of Robert’s generous intentions, Anna had felt a happy confidence in his success; but, as months passed away and no further tidings came from him, her hope grew faint, and but for the heart’s higher trust she would have sunk into deep despondency. Now, however, new

views of duty opened before her, and with willing steps and ready sympathy she sought to forget her own sorrow in ministering to the poor and afflicted around her, and especially in leading them to the same source of consolation whence she had drawn such full supplies.

How did the heart of Bessie, her ever dear sister, rejoice in the new tie which thus bound them! In her view Anna had lacked but one thing to perfect her lovely character; and, though the heavenly light which beamed so sweetly from her clear blue eye had been kindled from the ashes of her heart's immolation, Bessie could scarcely regret a sacrifice which had produced such glorious results. "Now, surely," thought she, "Anna's faith *will* have its reward," as she felt, in her short-sightedness, that the hand which smote should now be stayed. But not as our thoughts are the thoughts of Him who seeth the end from the beginning, and knoweth of what sore chastisement the heart hath need, ere it yields perfect obedience to his will. Not yet was the bitter cup to pass from her; not till its deep, dark draught had pervaded her life, and she had learned to bless the hand which pressed it to her lips.

Robert returned, but his eye had lost the light of hope, and his step the firmness of confident success, with which he left Asheville. He had been disappointed in the desire of his heart, and he, too, must learn the lesson of submission.

"I cannot bear," he said to Bessie, whom he sought immediately on his arrival, — "I cannot bear to meet the hopeless glance of her eye, when I had thought to fill it with such joy and gladness. From you she will better receive the sad news of my futile though earnest endeavors to discover her lost

treasures. Bear with you the sympathies and prayers of one who would fain have brought her more material comfort, but that joy was denied him."

"But, surely, Mr. Graham, you will see Anna, and allow her to express the gratitude she feels for your great kindness. Her disappointment will not be so great as you imagine, for, since your last letter, she has had but little hope of your success. She would wish, I know, to learn the whole truth from your lips."

"Perhaps it will be best," said he, after a moment's thoughtfulness, "but I would have gladly spared myself this trial."

Bessie did not exactly understand his meaning, but she saw that emotion too deep for utterance was agitating his whole frame. To divert him from this, she told him of the great change in Anna since he last saw her — the sweetness with which she had borne her affliction, and her own confidence that Anna's faith would triumph over whatever disappointments awaited her.

He listened in silence. One question he would ask, but dared not. Bessie seemed to divine his thoughts just then, for she added, "Anna has often spoken of you as a dear brother; — indeed, she could hardly be more attached to you if you were really so."

"Enough!" thought he; "a sister's affection is all she has left to bestow on me. Why did I hope for more? Henceforth this heart must learn to feel only fraternal affection for its long-cherished idol."

"But you were telling me, just now," said Bessie, who

felt uncomfortable, she knew not why, "of your friend. Why did he not return with you?"

"Mr. Lee has some business affairs which require his presence in Philadelphia. He will soon, however, join me here; for he has become deeply interested in Anna by his generous and unselfish labors for her, and well does he deserve her thanks."

"How noble," thought Bessie, "is Robert Graham! ever awarding praise to others, and receiving none himself."

Could she at that moment have looked into the heart she was extolling, how would she have been startled by its bitter upbraidings, that for years it had toiled on, not unselfishly, but with an almost undefined hope of reward at last, — reward which might well repay a thousand times more labor; and yet friends had called it a noble *sacrifice*! How did Robert condemn himself, as he walked slowly homeward, that he had, even unconsciously, acted a false part; that, while to others he had seemed the very embodiment of disinterested nobleness, his own heart had unceasingly plead for a boon richer than his whole life's service could merit! "Henceforth," said he, to himself, "I will prove myself worthy of such a sister. A *brother* will I be to her, and never shall she know the deep, unchanging love that lies buried within this heart."

Anna wandered restlessly about the house all the morning. An unusual depression had fallen upon her spirits, which she vainly tried to dispel. The rooms had never seemed more silent and deserted, and the echoes of little prattling voices were startlingly clear in her imagination. The *mother's* heart is struggling with its intense yearnings for the lost ones.

Never, in her youthful days, with the rich glow of health on her cheek, and sparkling in her eye, had she looked so lovely as now, when, in her abstraction, she sank upon a lounge, with her head resting heavily upon her hand, and her thoughts stretching far, far away, to the imagined resting-place of the little wanderers. Her simple mourning dress, while it cast an air of sadness about her, made more strikingly visible the transparent whiteness of her face and neck; and, as she sat there, lost in deep revery, she seemed more like a beautiful Parian statue, draped in sable garments, than a being of life and feeling.

The sound of approaching footsteps, the click of the gate, and the opening and closing of the door, were alike unheeded by her, whose senses were locked within the secret chambers of the soul. Now, however, as a well-remembered voice pronounced her name, the spirit returned from its weary flight, and she sprang eagerly forward, with a welcome on her lips.

“Anna, my dear sister!”

“O, Robert, have you come at last!”

What a world of agonized meaning dwelt in her eye, as she raised it in mute appeal to his own! The strong man’s heart quailed beneath that searching glance; but his voice was calm, as he replied,

“Anna, I grieve to come to you thus — *alone!* But will not the same faith which has so strengthened you in your hours of darkness now sustain you in this disappointment?”

He looked anxiously towards her as he ceased speaking; but for a moment no sound escaped her lips. She felt then how great had been her trust of late in this arm of flesh, and conscience whispered that such faith must ever end in disap-

pointment. But her heart returned at once to its allegiance, as she murmured, earnestly, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Robert, with a sigh of relief. Then, seating himself by her side, he told her all, — leaving no room for hope to allure her with its false light, — judging rightly, that thus would she best be prepared to meet the sorrowing life to which she seemed inevitably doomed. It was a long, sad tale, to which she listened in such painful silence; and though the voice, whose tones fell on her ear like pleasant memories of the past, was full of tender sympathy, she heeded naught save the terrible certainty that her darling children were lost to her beyond all hope. The perfidy of her husband, and the fearful retribution which followed, however it might at another time have affected her, now produced no visible emotion; and Robert began to think she scarce heard his words, till, as he closed, she exclaimed, "Leave me for a little time alone. But come again this afternoon, my dear brother."

Why did those words, so plaintively uttered, grate so harshly on his ear, as he left her presence? A *brother's* love was all he claimed — why could he not be satisfied?

Warm and friendly were the greetings bestowed on Robert by Squire Clayton and his wife, as he entered their sitting-room that afternoon. And Anna, too, was there, with a deeper shade of sadness on her brow. But the eye which met his was calm and clear. Those hours of silent heart-struggles — none may know their secrets. But the sweet expression of resignation resting on her face told the power of a faith which could thus triumph in that mother's heart.

Robert saw and felt its influence, while he mentally resolved that so bright an example should not be lost on him.

"Anna has told us of your toils and sufferings for her sake," said Mrs. Clayton. "Our warmest thanks would fall so far short of the obligation we feel, that I am almost ashamed to offer them."

"I regret that you should speak of it as an obligation conferred," replied Robert. "What I have done is no more than any of you would do under the same circumstances. That I must return unsuccessful, has been the greatest grief of my life!"

"If I could only know," said Anna, with a quivering lip, "that they are not in the power of those who would taint their pure hearts with their own false worship and dreadful heresy, it would alleviate a little of this bitterness!"

"This is a case, my child," replied her father, tenderly, "where we must bring not only ourselves, but those precious ones, and leave them in the arms of a Saviour, who can keep their hearts pure, and their lives in safety, till he sees fit, if ever in this world, to restore them unharmed to us."

Robert listened in astonishment; for he had not yet learned how much mercy had been mingled in their cup of sorrow.

"I am rejoiced to hear such sentiments from you, sir," he said; "truly, the ways of God are wonderful!"

"I, alone," replied the Squire, "have been the means of bringing all this misery upon our house. I acknowledge it with grief, and, could you know all the agony I have suffered in consequence, you might be more disposed to pity than blame me. But through such fires the Lord has seen fit to purify

my soul, and lead me to himself; and now my mouth must ever be filled with his praises."

Those were manly tears that now gathered in Robert's eyes; for he saw how she, the beautiful, the good and pure, had been made the sacrifice whose incense brought down such blessings.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ Let Fate do her worst, there are relics of joy,
Bright dreams of the past, which she cannot destroy ;
Which come in the night-time of sorrow and care,
And bring back the features that joy used to wear.”

MOORE.

DAYS and weeks fast glided into months, and still Robert lingered, though his heart uttered its loud warnings that thus was he destroying its peace. He had loved Anna in years past, when no cloud dimmed their vision of happiness as they looked forward to a joyful union. But when the dread moment came that severed them, and gave her to another, not at once did his heart yield to the stern decree. Years and years it struggled with its mighty passion, till at length higher and holier strength was given him to overcome all earthly hopes and desires. Had he met Anna in the bright sunshine of happiness and prosperity, he might still have remained calm and unmoved ; but the answering chord in his own heart vibrated to each note of grief as it welled forth from her broken spirit. If he had loved the beautiful maiden in her bright and joyous days, how did he now *revere* the no less lovely woman, against whom the rude blasts of adversity had pitilessly stormed, and who had come forth from its ruins purified, and, in his estimation, *glorified* ! And yet, in all

these weeks and months of daily intercourse, Robert kept his heart so strictly guarded, that not a word of love escaped his lips, and Anna suspected not its hidden secret. Strange to say, his own affairs had never been alluded to by either of them; and she, therefore, still remained undeceived with regard to his marriage. Whenever she attempted to speak to him of his home and his return thither, which she felt could not be much longer delayed, her heart silenced the words ere they reached her lips. Why, she could not tell; but she shrank from reminding him of dearer ties than those which prompted him to remain and comfort her. To her he was the devoted brother, whose absence would create such a painful void in her heart, that she could not for a moment contemplate it with calmness.

Let us leave her, for a time, to solve the enigma as best she may, while we look into the cheerful parsonage, — the home of such pure, unalloyed happiness. A new inmate — one, too, who seems quite at home — greets us as we enter its ever-pleasant sitting-room. James Lee — for he it is — had followed Robert to Asheville, to see one in whose fate he had, from the first, felt such a deep interest. A double motive actuated his desire to see her; for, with his usual quiet shrewdness, he had penetrated the secret which Robert thought so safely locked in his own breast, and, in his warm and increasing friendship for one so noble, he watched with no little anxiety for the dénouement in such a heart's history. He found in Bessie, the pastor's lovely wife, the warmest sympathy, both in his partiality for Robert and his intense interest and admiration of Anna. Without relatives, with no *one* spot that he might call home, James Lee had

been for years a wanderer. Some, who knew him in his youth, spoke of disappointment and affliction, but none knew the secret sorrow which sent him forth to spend among strangers the best years of his life. Wealth had lavished its treasures upon him, and he was returning once more to his native land, when he met Robert, as we have seen, and his lonely heart was at once drawn towards him, and entered with zeal into his plans. With the world before him where to choose, he yielded alike to his own inclination and Robert's entreaties, and Asheville became his home, for the present, at least. In the parsonage — where he was received as a member of its happy circle — he found that congeniality which his heart had so long desired; and in a few months he felt more at home than he had ever supposed it possible for him to be again.

“Mr. Lee,” said Bessie, one day, “what say you to a ride with us to B——, my native place? My husband has a little leisure, and proposes to spend to-morrow in rambling over scenes so pleasantly familiar to us both.”

“I will gladly go with thee,” replied he; “friend Herbert shall show me the mine where he found his treasure.”

“Who knows but there may yet be some treasure reserved for you in that mine?” returned she, laughing. But she instantly regretted that she had thus spoken, for his brow grew sad, as he replied,

“When the grave shall yield back its treasures, then may I claim mine, but not before.”

This was the first time he had alluded to himself; and tears gathered in Bessie's eyes as she thought what sad memories the past might have garnered for him.

“Some time,” said he, noticing her emotion, “you shall hear my story; but not now. We must carry none but cheerful faces among your friends.”

Bessie's heart throbbed gratefully at the warm and earnest welcome which everywhere greeted her from those who loved her for her father's sake, as well as her own. How lovingly her eye rested on the dear old manse, the quiet nook in the garden, and all the familiar scenes of her childhood! But to the church-yard, that sacred spot where, reposing in his last, long, quiet sleep, lay the form that her childish heart had ever idolized,—to that dear grave, watered by so many tears, she paid her last tribute, that from thence she might carry to her home its holy influences. Long they lingered around that spot, for Bessie had glowingly described to her willing listener the happy exit of the freed spirit; and Herbert Lindsey's deep, subdued voice had breathed their hearts' aspirations, while James Lee's form still bent over that mound, as in silent communings with the dead. A low moan sighed along the breeze, as it floated past them; then another and another in quick succession followed, and Bessie turned hastily around to see whence the sounds proceeded. At a little distance from them, on a newly-made grave, knelt a beautiful girl of some fifteen summers, her hair in wild disorder, and her whole appearance one of utter abandonment to the grief which vented itself in sobs and moans. In a moment Bessie was at her side. With one arm around her slight form, she gently raised her drooping head, when she exclaimed, in surprise,

“Why, Nelly! Can this be you—the bright, joyous little girl that danced so gayly among the flowers—mourning in this

sad, lonely place? Why are you here, and whose is this new grave?"

The weeping girl pointed to some tablets near by, which had not yet been erected. "There," said she, "was the only friend I had in this wide world!"

Bessie looked still more perplexed as she read the inscription, "Sacred to the memory of Miss Nancy Ellis." Nelly saw the look, and replied:

"The very day you were married, Miss Bes——, I mean Mrs. Lindsey, I did something, in my childish thoughtlessness, which made her very angry; and the next day, when I went to her to tell her how sorry I was that I had been so wicked, I found her crying very hard, and she said that she had lain all night thinking what a disagreeable person she must be to make everybody dislike her so, and how lonely and friendless she felt; and then she asked me if I would not come and live with her, and try to love her, and she would be a mother to me. Well has she kept her promise, Mrs. Lindsey, to the poor orphan-pauper; but now she is laid here, and I am again alone!" Here her fast-flowing tears choked her further utterance.

"But have you no friends, — I mean, no relatives?" asked Bessie, as she gently pressed the poor girl's hand.

"None in the world, that I know of," replied she. "I have no remembrance of any other home than the poor-house from which Miss Nancy took me, and to which I must now return."

"Not if I can prevent it," said Mr. Lee, who had drawn near them unobserved, and heard all that passed. "I, too, am alone in this world," added he; "and would gladly bind something to my heart to love and cherish. Wilt thou, dear

girl receive one in the place of her thou hast lost, who by her grave promises to thee a father's care and affection?"

Nelly looked up earnestly into the kindly-beaming eye bent upon her; child as she was in thought and feeling, what she read there spoke peace to her heart and hopeful trust, and she involuntarily clasped the hand extended to her, while, with charming naïveté, she replied,

"And will you love the poor orphan girl as though she were your own dear child?"

"Verily I will," he answered, with deep emotion, as memory held before his vision the sweet cherub image of his own lost one.

All this had passed quickly — so quickly that Bessie and her husband still stood in wondering astonishment; and yet the newly-adopted father and daughter felt that they were no longer strangers to each other. That solemn compact, so simply made, though fraught with momentous results — did not the silent voices of the sleepers beneath whisperingly echo it along, till, as it was registered above, *one* harp louder tuned its song of praise?

Bessie readily consented to receive Nelly into her own home till Mr. Lee could make suitable provision for her education; and a cheerful, happy group they were, as they returned to her hospitable roof.

"Now, Mr. Lee," said she, "what did I tell you? haven't you found your treasure?"

"Verily thou hast *almost* a prophet's tongue, Bessie," he replied, laughing, "if it always serves thee as now."

"See!" she answered, pointing to the window; "it needs no tongue of prophecy to predict the happiness there is in

store for Robert Graham. Look at him; what *has* come over him?"

As she spoke, Robert crossed the street, and, looking up, his eye met her inquiring glance, when a smile, bright and joyful, lighted up his face, and with a quick step he entered the room where they were sitting. But, while he is attempting to answer all the questions so rapidly pressed upon him, let us look back a little, and see what has thus agitated one usually so calm.

For many days past Robert had subjected himself to the most severe self-scrutiny, determined that no longer would he be blind to the true state of his heart. He had tried to subdue his deep passion into a calm, tranquil, though tender fraternal affection; but it was in vain, so long as he witnessed the increasing loveliness of Anna's character. He must leave her, and that, too, at once, lest he should waver in his resolution to claim no more than a brother's love. Again must he go forth to wage anew the war within his own breast, but not, as before, in his own strength. Already he felt a sustaining power within him to meet even this trial, and, with a calmness which surprised himself, he sought Anna that morning for a last interview. He found her alone, busily engaged with her needle, but sad, as usual.

"Anna," said he, cheerfully, "are you not almost ashamed of such a lazy brother? Only think how long I have been about here, doing nothing."

"Do you call it nothing," she replied, "to bring so much sunshine into our hearts and home?"

"Indeed, I do not; I bless God, and ever shall, for per-

mitting me to be near you in your distress but, now that you no longer need me, I must away to other duties."

The work dropped from Anna's hand, and a tear trembled in her eye as she spoke.

"I will try not to be so selfish," she said; "but, O, how lonely it will be when you are gone!"

"Can I, then, add so much to your happiness?" he asked, earnestly.

"Most assuredly, Robert; have you not been to me the kindest of all brothers?"

Again his heart rebelled; but she suspected it not. "Who could or would have done what you have?" she continued, artlessly; "and then, too, from you I have learned how the heart may yield up all its treasures with a calm and perfect trust in God. O, Robert, you have indeed nobly performed your mission, and I will not murmur that voices from your own home lure you back; but will you not, when there, sometimes breathe a prayer for the lonely, childless one?"

Her tears fell fast, but they were all unheeded by him who sat at her side, his head buried in his hands, and his soul in wild commotion. He had heard but one thing in all she said; one idea only possessed him;—what did she mean by his own home? *Could* she suppose there were others dearer to him than herself? What strange joy thrilled his breast, as, for one moment, his heart pleaded eagerly to be heard, that, perchance, it might awaken some response to its long years of faithfulness; nor did its throbbings cease as he answered, tremulously, "My prayers, dear Anna, will ever be yours; but to what home you would consign me, I know not. I have neither friends nor home away from here."

“I thought, Robert,” — and her voice faltered a very little, — “I thought you were long since married, and —”

“Thought I was married, Anna!” he exclaimed, in a voice half-joyful, half-reproachful; “how could you think so?”

“Where, then, did you just now speak of going?” she asked, evading his last query.

“Anywhere, Anna, so that I may teach this heart the lesson it once learned — only to forget!”

She looked up inquiringly.

Hopes, fears and resolutions, were alike forgotten then, as he passionately clasped her hand, exclaiming, “Anna, are *all* the dreams of our youth forgotten? Does memory *never* awaken echoes from the past, when, before these years of blight and sorrow, we were happy — O, so happy in each other’s love! Forgive me, Anna,” he continued, as she gently withdrew her hand to hide her tearful face, “that I have thus unconsciously betrayed myself. I came here with a farewell upon my lips — a farewell that you, perhaps, would approve; but in these last few moments hope has whispered such a wild dream of joy into my heart, that I cannot now leave you, save at your bidding, till all the hopes and fears with which I have ineffectually struggled, and from which I cannot fly, are confided to you.”

He paused a moment, and watched earnestly the trembling hands which still covered her face; then, gathering courage from her silence, he bent low his head near her own, and in the same deep tones with which he had won her youthful love did he now breathe into her listening ear the hoarded secret of years. He told her all — all that he had suffered in his wanderings afar off, when he had striven by every

means to banish her image from his heart; how that, in the whirl of business, when fortune seemed but to mock him with her golden favors, or in the midst of beauteous and high-born maidens, whose winning smiles would have warmed into life hearts less stoical than his; whether roaming by sea or land alone, or surrounded by warm, friendly voices, his heart had ever turned, hopelessly, indeed, but unalterably, to her. And when, in his intense desire to witness her happiness, which alone, he felt, would reconcile him to his fate, he sought again his home, who could picture his agony as the first news of that dreadful tragedy reached his ear, and he knew that the happiness, and perhaps life, of her he loved, was crushed, and that, too, by one who should have cherished her as a rare gift! In his grief he called upon Bessie, and besought her to gain for him a place — a brother's place — by the bedside of the woe-stricken mother; and, as day after day he listened to her piteous ravings, and found that *his* voice alone had power to soothe her frenzy, and *his* was the hand she unconsciously clasped in preference to all others, then he felt, in all its weight, the humiliating truth that not as a brother did he love the wife of another. What hours of anguish he endured, none might know; but gradually a divine light stole gently and sweetly within his soul, and taught him a higher and holier love. And when he went forth thankful that his fortune could now be spent in her service, no other hope incited him, in his ceaseless efforts, save that he might be permitted to restore happiness to the desolated heart. That for a moment a thrill of joy had swept through his heart when he knew she was free, he confessed; but he had since been made to feel that the dark wave which so mercilessly engulfed her had

hid, with its black crest, all the brightness of her young life. O, how earnestly he had prayed that this night of sorrow might pass away! but now he must leave her; no longer will he deceive her or his own heart in its passionate pleadings for a dearer, tenderer tie than sister. He would not have thus betrayed his love, had not something within whispered of hope and joy.

Thus did that noble heart, now for the first time in years uttering its own language, pour forth its hidden treasures in the deep stillness of that hour. The agitated form, the trembling hands, which still concealed her face, and from beneath which tear-drops fell fast and warm, were as yet her only response; but, as he paused, and in a voice of intense emotion exclaimed, "Speak to me, Anna; say that you forgive me!" she gently laid one trembling hand in his, and murmured, "O, Robert, you have not deserved such suffering. If this poor, worthless hand can repay you —"

"Nay, nay, Anna," cried he, interrupting her, while his whole frame shook with agitation; "not from *gratitude* can I receive this priceless boon."

"From the *love*, then, of a heart which, though blighted and withered, turns with its first and only affection to that faithful breast!" — and she leaned her head upon his shoulder, weeping in her joy.

How swiftly flew the hours of that day, and what wonder that Robert's step was quick, and his heart light, as at night-fall he entered the parsonage, in his unutterable happiness.

"Now are my prayers answered," said Bessie, with suffused eyes, as he told her of his great joy, while the no less

sympathizing "Friend" raised his hands, and feelingly exclaimed,

"God be thanked, friend Robert, that thy noble, self-sacrificing life is at last rewarded; may the blessing thou so richly deservest rest upon thee both."

Quiet and simple were the preparations for their speedy marriage; for Robert insisted, and not without reason, that there was no occasion for delay.

On the bright and cloudless morning they had chosen for their nuptials the bridal party silently assembled around the altar, and while Herbert Lindsey's deep voice, tremulous with unwonted agitation, echoed through those sacred walls, the low-murmured responses of the marriage vow broke from the lips of the trembling bride with sad earnestness. Even in this hour of sacred joy, *the mother could not forget!*

CHAPTER XVIII.

“O, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive !”

SCOTT.

At the lower end of the spacious garden, adjoining the chateau we have before described, was an arbor of exquisite workmanship; a source of unceasing admiration to the few who were admitted within those private walks, but who little suspected its hidden purpose.

The dense forest, whose grim heads nodded as they peered over the high enclosure, seemed not more impenetrable than were *its* mysteries to Ralph, the new gardener. Now, Ralph, like many others, beneath a stupid and most forbidding exterior possessed an active and inquiring mind. Ignorant he was, most certainly, and superstitiously devoted to the worship of the Blessed Virgin. Perhaps for these very reasons Bernaldi regarded him as well fitted for his service; and, therefore, he had, with many instructions and warnings, installed him in his new station, about two weeks previous to the time to which we refer. Ralph's restless, inquisitive eyes, shaded by their huge, shaggy brows, had often watched with no little curiosity the peculiar care with which Father Ber-

naldi guarded the beautiful arbor. Implicitly believing in the unlimited spiritual power of his confessor, the simple gardener began to think that this might be the entrance to those purgatorial fires with which he had been so often threatened.

"I 'se bound to find out suthing 'bout it," muttered he, one afternoon, as he hid himself among the bushes, where he could, unobserved, command a view of the entrance; "'cause, ye see, I an't allers jest so good, and maybe I'd get a push down there afore I knowed it. Catch this old feller a-stayin' so nigh that hot place, I tell ye!"

Just then his cogitations were cut short by the appearance of Bernaldi, who, gliding along the path which led to the arbor, looked cautiously about him, and, taking from his pocket a key, opened the mysterious door, unconscious that a pair of great rolling eyes were peering at him through the bushes. Before he closed it, those eyes had scanned every inch of the simple structure, though in so doing they had well-nigh betrayed themselves.

After waiting a few moments in silence, Ralph distinctly heard the click of another door as it opened and shut; while a confused mingling of voices and trampling of feet sounded to his excited imagination like the struggling of fiends to escape from their confinement. Not another moment did he lose; but, springing from his place of concealment, he rushed through the garden, and, overturning everything that came in his way, plunged into the kitchen, in terrible agitation.

"I tell ye — I te-ll ye — I te-e-ll ye, Judy," he chattered through his teeth, while his great sturdy frame shook like an

aspen-leaf, with fright, "I te-ll ye, we 're livin' in a drefful dangerous place."

The portly cook, who, at his first appearance, had dropped the dish in her hand, and stood, with uplifted arms, gazing in astonishment at such an apparition, exclaimed,

"Goodness gracious, Ralph, what is the matter?"

"O-h, Judy!" said he, turning round to see that the evil spirits were not already at his heels, "we're on the brink o' pardition, we be, and afore ye knows it we shall all be pitched in. I he'erd 'em jest now, the devils!" and he dropped on his knees, before a rude crucifix in the corner, muttering prayers and telling beads with such vehemence that Judy was overcome with his devotion, and kneeled too, though she had n't the most remote idea what she was praying against.

"Come, now," said she, as his excitement was somewhat abated by this *cooling* process, "tell me what 't was scared you so — there an't no devils round here, be they?"

"I 'spect there is, and I 'se for making tracks quick, I tell ye. Maybe ye don't know how nigh ye are to purgatory, hey, Judy? Wal, now, I 'll jest tell you; ye're jest as fur off as the bottom of the garden, and no funder." Here Ralph brought down his fist with such force on the table that poor Judy was struck with terror.

"Laws a massy, what do you mean, Ralph?" cried she; "a-scaring a poor widder woman that has n't got nobody to go to!"

"Don't be afeared, Judy; I'll take care on ye, if ye 'll only git away from here, quick as pos-ser-ble."

"What would their reverences say?" asked the cook.

Ralph's courage visibly forsook him at this question; for, in his fright, he had not thought of bishop or priest.

"Tell ye what, I don't know," he answered; "but, when the devil 's at your heels, what ye 'goin' to do?"

"*What d'ye see*, Ralph, anyhow?" asked Judy, who felt rather disposed to look into the matter a little before taking such a decided step.

"I seed enuf, and he'erd enuf, to scare a nigger. In the first place, I seed his ruv'rence go right down into the bowels o' the airth, and then I he'erd *sich* noises! — O, lud, 't would turn ye rite inter stone."

"You don't, though! where was it?" said Judy, trembling all over.

"Did n't I tell ye 't was rite down to the bottom o' that garden — that little house an't rigged up so for nothin'. There 's suthin' 'sterious 'bout it, ye might know, when his ruv'rence goes in there every day, and sometimes don't come out agin till the next day. I 've had my 'spicions afore now, I tell ye!"

By this time Judy had recovered herself sufficiently to ask a few more questions, which drew the whole story from Ralph, when an inkling of the truth flashed upon her mind. Standing before him, her arms akimbo, and her little gray eyes sparkling with vexation and mirth, she poured forth her reproaches in no very measured strains.

"Laws a massy!" exclaimed she, "you old fool, you dolt, you curmudgeon, a-comin' here to 'sturb my rest, jest 'cause you 'spects, when there an't nothin' to 'spect for! Don't you know, you lubber, that master goes in there to see the children?"

"Where? what children?" broke in Ralph, rubbing his eyes, in amazement.

"O, go 'long, ye greeny! If ye don't know now, I 'm good mind not to tell ye. You 've frightened me so, now, I shan't sleep a wink to-night."

"Wal!" said Ralph, drawing himself up, with as much dignity as he could, after the storm, "ye can tell me or not, jest as ye please; but, if there an't some circumboberation about that little house, then my name an't Ralph Riley, that 's all!"

'T was astonishing what effect his eloquence had upon Miss Judy; for, wiping the perspiration from her smooth, round face, she sat down and began at once to tell him what she knew about it.

"A year ago or thereabouts," said she, "a poor widder woman, like me, only she was a lady, sent for his reverence, my master, 'cause she was a-dyin', and wanted absolution. So, when he went to see her and give her the blessed sacrament, she begged him to take her two little children and bring 'em up for the church. Ye see some o' her wicked relations wanted to get 'em and make heretics of 'em, and it a'most killed her for fear they would. So, when she died, what does good Father Bernaldi do, but he fixes up as nice a house as ever you seed, and puts 'em in there to live, where those wicked folks can't find 'em. There can't nobody get at 'em, only through the garden; and that 's why he keeps it locked all the time. He 's terrible fond of 'em, and that 's where he goes when you see him go through that little house. I 'spose you he'erd 'em all runnin' and talkin' to-day when he

went in, and that's what scared you so. Ha! ha! ha! What a fool you was!"

Ralph did n't quite like the *conclusion* of the matter, but he was too much interested to notice it; so he very mildly asked "how old were the children, and had anybody tried to get 'em, and where could the house be?"

"Tried! Laws, yes! A man all whiskered up, and pertendin' to be a gentleman, was round here, and then cum back, with another funny-looking man, and they tried every way, but they could n't get no news of 'em. I'd a fought myself afore they'd a got 'em, the miserable heretics! Little Charlie is a'most five and Myrtie two year old, and sweeter youngsters never lived. To be sure, their house was lonesome-like, but 't was a pretty walk through the woods. Some day, when master's willing, we'll go and see 'em."

Judy had grown fairly eloquent as she concluded her tale, and Ralph must be forgiven if he forgot his fright, the arbor, children and everything else, in his profound admiration of the being before him. Certain it is that voices were heard much later than usual, that night, in the housekeeper's room, and Ralph smacked his lips more than once, the next day, in a sort of dreamy remembrance of "joys that 'he'd' tasted."

The little thatched cottage, so lovingly nestled in the midst of a green thicket, seemed strangely isolated and lonely. Save a little spot, which had been cleared around it, and which busy hands had made to bloom with beauty, all was dark and gloomy as the grave. Little, curious, prying feet, had often trod on the verge of the thick copse which surrounded it, and peered with eager eyes into the mysteries beyond, but

never ventured a step further. Strange home for the warm, expanding sympathies of childhood to be nurtured in! and yet, here, hidden from the agonized search of loving friends, with none but cold hearts to rest upon, dwelt the mother's treasures. O, why do not the birds, in their free, joyous flight, bear over land and sea, to one longing ear, the piteous wailings of those little hearts, for "mamma, dear mamma"?

It was just one year, Bernaldi remembered, as, carefully removing some clustering vines, he opened the secret door, from which a path wound circuitously to the lone cottage, and which, indeed, was the only entrance to that spot, — it was just one year since he had accomplished the most daring feat he ever attempted; and a smile of triumph lighted his dark face, as he thought how ingeniously he had thwarted all search, and how securely he now held the little defenceless ones in his own grasp. It was no part of his plan to be repulsive to them, and therefore he was far from being displeased at the shout of joy and clapping of little hands with which his appearance was hailed: so instinctively will childhood's heart cling to some object of love. As usual, he had plenty of bonbons which he scattered in their path, with a few words to the girl who accompanied them, and then he passed on to the cottage.

Its few rooms were fitted up with neatness, taste, and even elegance; for money had not been sparingly bestowed, before death claimed the misguided father — and *the church* had weighty reasons for continuing these luxuries. One room alone remained untouched; its bare and comfortless walls and floor, with its rudely-constructed altar and solemn crucifix, had oft bore witness to the *austere* devotion performed there.

At this very hour, before that crucifix kneeled the form of a woman habited in the garb of a sister of charity. None knew the long hours she had thus prostrated herself, or witnessed the fierce conflict raging within her breast. *Remorse* was a strange guest there, and, as it pointed with its long, spectral finger to the records of the past, or turned with grim and savage menaces to the future, her soul writhed in its merciless torture.

“O, blessed Mother!” she cried, “save me from this hour, and with my life will I make reparation to those whom I have wronged! O, most holy Virgin! hear the vows which I now make to thee, ere my soul sinks, in its guilt —”

A low, mocking laugh broke painfully on the stillness of that moment, and caused the devotee to spring hastily to her feet, while the indignant blood mounted to her temples; for well she knew the voice—it had been to her both the light and curse of her life.

“What spot on earth can ever be secure from your intrusion?” haughtily demanded she of him who had thus rudely shocked her better feelings.

“Softly, softly, my good Marguerite,” replied the intruder; “don’t let your hasty temper get the better of your judgment! I was only laughing at the penance you would inflict on yourself for an *imaginary* wrong. You are really growing very zealous.”

“Ay, scoff at me, and scorn me too, if you will, for being just what you have made me! O, Alphonso, would to God I had never seen you! Then had not these hands been steeped in every crime.”

“Why, Marguerite!” said he, in a tone which he well knew

would reach her heart, "you are in a strange mood to-day; what has come over you?"

"I scarcely know, myself," she replied; "but since morning I have had the strangest feelings! It was just a year ago to-day, you know, that we took those children, and all day long it has seemed to me I could hear their mother's terrible shrieks. It is foolish, I know, but I often wish I had never seen them."

"Marguerite, beware!" sternly uttered the priest. "These wicked fancies are treason to the church, and deserve her heaviest punishment. Have you no love for the souls of the dear children, that you regret saving them from those abominable heretics? Had you never done any other service, this alone would canonize you; but beware how you impiously provoke the wrath of the bishop, who, for this very act, has granted you special indulgences, and who has the power at any moment to retract them, and deliver you over to perdition."

His words had the desired effect, for her momentary repentance subsided at once into her usual abject servility, and she humbly knelt at the confessional, giving every thought and feeling to the keeping of a frail mortal like herself. The world looks on and calls this a "harmless infatuation;" but can that be harmless which gives to *man* the censorship of the soul?

Bernaldi's suspicions were aroused; he had several times before surprised Marguerite in tears, but never till this interview did he imagine the cause. When he selected her as a fit accomplice in his cold-blooded deed of child-robbery, and gave to her the mother's task of rearing them, he was not

mistaken in her fitness for the work. She had been too long under his tutelage to shrink from any crime, and her instinctive hatred toward everything good had been fully gratified in the deathless misery she had helped to bring upon one whose only fault was her goodness. But a year's companionship with the artless innocence and purity of childhood had softened her nature, and awakened latent hopes and desires, of which she was as yet scarcely conscious. Thoughts of her own bright and happy youth, till the shadow of the deceiver fell on her path, — the days and years of alternate sin and sorrow which darkened her life and hardened her heart, till she seemed the veriest wretch on earth, — would force themselves upon her conscience, as they had done this day, and lead her to penances the most revolting, in the vain hope that they would remove the plague-spot from her soul!

Bernaldi saw all this; he knew, even better than she did, the workings of her mind; and, while he dared not remove her from the sweet childish influences which had produced this effect, he determined to watch her more closely, and to bring her oftener to confession, that so he might use more effectually the unbounded influence he had ever possessed over her, to prevent any serious results.

"Come, Marguerite," said he, gayly, "let's away with these sad, gloomy thoughts, and discuss, over a cup of your nice tea, more cheerful topics. You will soon get over these idle whims, and laugh at your own folly. But where are Charlie and Myrtie? Ah! here they come, the darling little things! How they will learn to thank you, a few years hence, for bringing them into our holy church!"

"O, Margery!" cried little Charlie, bounding into the

room, followed by his wee, toddling sister, "see what nice things the 'good father' gave me! Here's some for you;" and he held out his little, plump hand filled with sweetmeats, while Myrtie seated herself on the floor, and began munching hers as though there was not another person in the world to care for.

"You're a generous little fellow, Charlie, but Margery does n't want any now."

He looked up wonderingly in her face at such a refusal, and his quick eye detected the traces of tears. Instantly the little hand dropped its load, and he sprang into her lap and threw his arms about her neck.

"What does poor Margery cry for? Have you lost your mamma, too?" asked he, tenderly, ever connecting tears with such a loss.

"No, darling, 'poor Margery' has n't got any mamma;—but you are her little boy, and will let her be your mamma, won't you?" and she stroked his fair hair, lovingly.

"No, no, not my *mamma*!" cried he, earnestly, "but my dear, good Margery."

"And why not your mamma?" Bernaldi asked, amused at his earnestness.

"Because—because," said the little fellow, with a perplexed look, "I've got one mamma away over the water, and some day, when I'm a man, I shall go and find her—shan't I, Margery?"

"Perhaps so," replied she, trembling at Bernaldi's darkened look.

"No, you won't!" said he, sharply; "she's a wicked woman, and you must never call her mamma again—do you hear?"

— and he jerked the little arm, — “mind you never say that again, or I shall put you into a dark hole, and keep you there till you die!”

“Should I go to heaven, then?” asked Charlie, with a quivering lip.

“You’d go right to purgatory, where all wicked boys go!” said the priest, angrily.

“But if I kneeled down and prayed, just as Auntie Bessie used to, then God would take me to heaven, — would n’t he, Margery?”

“No, no, my child,” replied she; “you are very wicked to talk so! You must pray just as I teach you to. Here, kneel down and ask the ‘good father’ to forgive you for such naughty words.”

The little fellow did as he was told. But his childish heart throbbed with a sense of injustice and wrong, and drew more closely within itself the image of his dear, lost mamma, — that image which time, with all its changes, could never efface.

Child as he was when torn from his mother’s arms, the scene was forever engraved upon his memory, — nor could persuasions, threats or diversion, still his incessant cries for “mamma” for many a weary day, as the vessel bore away its precious load, widening the gulf between those loving hearts. Her look of imploring agony, as she clutched the carriage-wheel in a vain effort to stop its course, and was brutally knocked away, reached that child-heart, never, never to be forgotten. He seemed instinctively to know the base part his father bore in that terrible transaction; for he shunned, with utter aversion, every attempt to conciliate him, and clung

rather to the stranger priest and his new nurse. His baby-sister, the darling Myrtie, became his great care; and upon her would he lavish all the endearments with which his little heart was filled. Lady Duncan he would never call "grand-mamma," for to him that title belonged only to the dear old familiar face in his own mamma's home; and he was better pleased with the lonely, quiet cottage, and only Marguerite and Myrtie for company, than in the rich halls of his father's house. So they had but little trouble in secluding their orphaned treasures, while the mission of these child-angels worked silently its way into the hearts of those about them.

CHAPTER XIX.

“Foul whisperings are abroad ; and unnat’ral deeds
Do breed unnat’ral troubles : infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.”

“Leave her to heaven,
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her.”

SHAKSPEARE.

“FOOL!” muttered Bernaldi to himself, as he retraced his steps to the chateau. “Women are *always* fools about children! I thought she was made of better stuff than most of them, though. But I’ll have no more of it ; I’ll put a stop to it, if I have to stop her breath. Marguerite, ever ready to do my bidding, to be cajoled by those brats ! Pshaw ! what an absurdity ! But I’ll manage *her* yet, if she don’t take care.” So saying, he passed quietly through the arbor, and confronted Ralph just as the latter was peering through every crevice in the wall to get a glimpse beyond.

“Ralph, what are you doing there ?” said he, quickly.

“Yur ruv’rence, sir,” answered the gardener, bowing low, “I was looking after an animal as run into that hole.”

“What sort of an animal ?”

“Wal, yur ruv’rence, it looked mighty like a cat, only ’t war n’t bigger ’n a squirrel.”

"Pooh! you foolish fellow, 'twas a weasel, I suppose. You must look out for the poultry, Ralph, or he will make his supper out of them."

"Yes, *sir*, your ruv'rence," said Ralph, placing his forefinger on his nose in a quizzical manner, as he turned away.

"Look here, Ralph," said Bernaldi, coming back, as a sudden thought seemed to strike him; "did Judy ever tell you anything — about — what was beyond that arbor, there?"

"Not 'zactly, yur ruv'rence."

"What *did* she tell you, Ralph?"

"Wal, she said yur ruv'rence was mighty kind to the poor, and was bringin' some on 'em up summers round here."

"Was that *all* she told you, Ralph?"

"It's all I remember, yur ruv'rence." Ralph was an adept at mental reservation.

"I am very glad to find Judy is so discreet," added Bernaldi. "But, Ralph, you seem to be an honest, well-disposed person; supposing I should tell you a secret, and need your assistance, could you be trusted?"

"Ay, yur ruv'rence. Ralph Riley can be trusted anywhere," answered he, with growing importance.

"But if the secret concerned our holy church, and you betrayed it, do you know the penance, Ralph?"

"To die a dog's death, I s'pose," growled Ralph; "it's no more 'n I'd deserve."

"Worse than that, Ralph. When you were dead your body would be thrown to the dogs, and your *soul* cursed into hell!"

Poor Ralph's knees knocked together very perceptibly at

the stern manner and words of his master; and, devoutly crossing himself, he awaited any further communications.

"But I know," continued Bernaldi, encouragingly, "you would sooner die than be guilty of anything so wicked. I see that I can trust you, now; so, listen to me attentively, and remember all I say."

"I will, yur ruv'rence." And Ralph drew a long breath of relief.

"About a year ago," began Bernaldi, seating himself on a rustic bench, while the gardener stood, hat in hand, in serf-like subjection, "I was sent for to see a poor woman who was dying, and who was in great distress because some of her husband's relations wanted to get her two little children and make heretics of them."

"O—h!" groaned his listener.

"Well, you know, I could n't resist the poor woman's entreaties; and so, before she would receive the holy sacrament, I promised I would see that they were brought up in the true faith. You ought to have seen how happy this promise made her, and how, after a good confession, she placed her soul in the hands of the church, that masses might be said over her till she was fit for the society of the Blessed Virgin. Such a death as hers was glorious, Ralph; for she lived a good Catholic, and now we have prayed her soul through purgatory."

Ralph bowed, with profound humility.

"But no sooner was she dead than those wretches—those vile heretics—tried to take away the children; and I had to hide them away from their wicked hands. Now, Ralph, what I want to tell you is this. Those little children that I

saved from destruction live in a nice cottage in those woods, yonder, and the only way to get there is through that door where you saw me come out just now. The boy has got some strange notions in his head from his father's folks; and we must get them out of him. Do you think I can trust you, Ralph, to keep these gates all locked, and, if any one asks you questions about the children, to say you 'know nothing' of them, and to keep a sharp lookout towards everybody that comes here?"

"Trust me for all them things," answered he, with a knowing shake of his shaggy head.

"That's right, Ralph; you know what becomes a good Catholic when these heretics try to cheat us."

"Give 'em what they deserve," said Ralph, warming with the subject. "If they come near me with any of their infernal stuff, they'll get it, I tell ye, yur ruv'rence."

Bernaldi smiled encouragingly at his earnestness; and Ralph, thus emboldened, went on:

"I han't lived all these long years for nothin', I tell ye; Ralph Riley's the man that knows what he's about. If any o' them devils come prowlin' round here after the poor little innocents, they'll git the power o' me, I tell ye, yur ruv'rence."

His "ruv'rence" did not seem inclined to check the ardor of his servant in the least, but said, as he rose to go:

"I have no doubt you will do all that's right, Ralph; and, as I am going away for two or three weeks, I shall feel quite safe to leave things with you. There's one thing more, though, I want to speak to you about; but, for the price of your soul, don't you dare mention what I say to any one. The woman

in there, who takes care of the children, appears rather strange lately ; now, you must watch her closely, and tell me, when I come back, everything she has said and done. Do you understand ? ”

“ Yes, *sir*, yur ruv’rence.”

“ Well, now come in with me, till I make your promise, sure.”

Ralph followed his master’s steps into a small room, and, kneeling as he was bid before the cross, laid his hand on the Bible, and swore solemnly, by the Blessed Virgin and all the saints, to be and do everything his priest commanded him. When he returned again to the garden, it was with a much greater consciousness of his own superiority than he had ever felt before.

“ Now I’m in for ’t,” said he, rubbing his hands, with great satisfaction ; “ see if Ralph Riley don’t know a thing or two, that ’s all ! ”

“ I am vexed, heartily vexed,” said Bernaldi, as he entered the library, to its only occupant. “ I wish there were no such things as women in the world ! ”

“ I don’t believe you would stay in it long, then,” replied the other, laughing ; “ but what ’s the matter now ? ”

“ If Marguerite can’t be trusted,” added Bernaldi, without noticing the jest, “ who is there that can ? ”

“ Why, what makes you think she isn’t trustworthy ? ” asked his companion, a little anxiously.

Bernaldi related the particulars of his visit, while the bishop listened attentively. “ This must be looked into a little more carefully ” at length said the latter ; “ it will not do to in-

dulge her in such whims. She must be removed at once, if you suspect any misgivings on her part."

"I think the lesson I gave her to-day will do her some good," replied Bernaldi. "At any rate, try her till I come back; she can't do much harm before that. But, if you will allow me, sir, I would advise you to look to her often."

"I will do so," said the bishop; "yet I should have thought her capable of anything but regret."

"It is her weakness towards children that causes such feelings; she told me as much herself," Bernaldi answered.

"Curse them, and her too!" exclaimed the bishop; "we've got enough to attend to, without so much trouble about them!"

"I have sworn in Ralph, our new gardener, and he will keep you informed of all her movements," said Bernaldi.

"Is he safe?"

"Yes; I have made him so, I believe."

Ralph, in all the dignity of his new office of spy, walked up and down the broad gravelled paths, the morning after his memorable interview with his master and priest. Now and then he would stop to peer through the interstices in the wall into the mysteries beyond; but this did not satisfy him, and, taking from his pocket a key, which he looked at with great pride, he unlocked the door through which he had gazed in his fright the day before, and, imitating as nearly as possible the movements of his master, he cautiously closed it, and, not without some trembling, found himself within the very enclosure he had so carefully scanned. But the last twenty-

four hours had been fraught with great events to Ralph; and the consciousness that he was now acting as the confidant and agent of his *ruv'rance* gave him courage. So, the inner door was opened, according to his directions, and, looking around, he saw nothing but a well-trodden path hedged by the thick wood. Naturally far from being courageous, and not a little superstitious withal, Ralph hesitated before closing the door after him; but the twittering of birds and the chirping of squirrels overhead were all the sounds that met his ear, and he ventured a little way along, though the slightest sudden noise would have sent him rushing back to his quarters. The perfect quietude of the forest seemed to reassure him, and he followed the beaten track till it led him to an opening, where he started back with surprise.

Ralph's weakest point, and one which he had always considered a failing, was very sensibly affected by the sight which here met his gaze, and riveted him to the spot; for on a grassy plot before the cottage door sat little Myrtie, her lap and chubby arms filled with flowers, joining in Charlie's glee as he danced around her, and clapping her little fat hands for joy as he threw a fresh load of glowing roses over her.

"Pshaw!" said Ralph, brushing away a tear from his rough cheek; "what do I care for children? I wish I was n't such a plaguy fool, though! I won't mind THEM, anyhow!" and he strode up to the cottage door, fully determined to conquer, for once, this foolish weakness of his nature.

Charlie and his little sister both sprang at once towards the door, frightened at the unwonted sight of a strange face; but Myrtie's step was not so firm as her brother's, and, in her haste, she fell upon the corner of the door-step, cutting a gash

in her temple, which in a moment covered her little face with blood. Her screams brought out the only two occupants of the cottage at once to her assistance, but not before Ralph had caught her in his arms, stanching the wound with his handkerchief, and soothing her cries as gently as a woman. 'T was strange to see that great uncouth being bend so tenderly over the little form in his arms; but stranger still were the beatings of that untutored heart beneath its light load, for then and there did Ralph, despite all his resolutions, receive that little nestling as his guardian angel, bestowing upon her, at the same time, so much love, that naught remained. Alas, poor Ralph! he has unwittingly thrown himself into a labyrinth of difficulty, through which even that innocent guardianship may not be able to guide him!

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said he, as Marguerite started back, on seeing the child in his arms. "I did n't mean to hurt her. There, sh—! sh—!" and he raised the little forehead to his lips.

"How came you here?" she asked, in no very pleasant tones, as she held out her hands for the child. But the *spiritual* telegraph had been faithfully at work the last moment, and Myrtie clung to her new protector, who pressed her more closely to his heart.

"I'm only Ralph, the gardener," said he, apologetically; "I thought you would be lonesome like, and so, by leave of my master, I come over to see if I can do anything for you."

The lady's countenance changed; for, besides being glad of almost any interruption of her monotonous life, she had a woman's curiosity to learn all the gossip of the place, and she thought this a fine opportunity.

"So, you are the new gardener, are you? Well, you may come in while I wash the blood from Myrtie's face; she can't be hurt very much, I think."

Marguerite spoke pleasantly, and Ralph began to look upon her as some nice body.

"I allers did take to children," said he, as they went into the house; "but that's the purtiest darlin' I ever see."

"Yes, she's a dear little thing; but, Myrtie, what makes you run to that man so? Won't you sit in Margery's lap?"

"No, no!" cried she, as she nestled again into those great arms, and still deeper into the heart beneath, "sissy love a sit here."

"'T would be a plaguy shame for them heretics to git hold o' this birdie, would n't it, now?" said Ralph, smoothing the little flaxen ringlets with his huge paw.

Marguerite looked at him in blank astonishment. "What do you mean?" asked she, quickly.

"O, nothin' special," said he, with much confusion, as his oath popped into his mind.

"But you *did* mean something; what was it?" persisted Marguerite.

"'T wan't nothin' at all," — and Ralph's agitation visibly increased, — "only, you know, they're allers trying to get away our best 'uns."

Marguerite saw that he knew more than he chose to tell; but the nature and extent of his information she was determined to find out, half hoping that, by some means, he had learned their story.

"What is a heretic, Margery?" asked little Charlie, who who had been an interested though unnoticed listener.

"A heretic, child! Why, they are dreadful wicked folks, that will roast little children and eat them, if they can catch them."

"Where do they live, Margery?" said he, drawing closer to her, and looking in the direction of the woods.

"O, they live all about here; and, if we didn't take good care of you, they would soon get you and Myrtie."

"Can't God drive them off?" he asked, innocently.

"What a strange boy this is!" exclaimed Marguerite, taking him into her lap. "The good father can keep them away from you, if you do just as he tells you."

"That's it, boy," chimed in Ralph; "you must please his ruv'rence, if you want him to save you."

Charlie gazed, in childish wonder, from the honest, rough visage of one, into the pale, anxious face of the other; and, unable to cope with such intellects, ran off to his play, calling Myrtie to join him.

"Them's picters, I tell ye!" cried Ralph, following their little forms with his longing eyes. "Ye don't see such every day."

"That's true," replied Marguerite; "but how came you to know anything about them?"

"O, 't an't none o' my business," said Ralph, scratching his head, with a perplexed air; "but his ruv'rence told me to look in upon ye sometimes, while he's gone."

"Gone! where has he gone now?"

"Can't tell ye, ma'am, 'cause I never meddle with other folks' business."

"He goes away often, don't he?"

"Yes 'm."

"Does he go far, do you think?"

"Don't know 'm."

"You don't seem to be very communicative," said his interrogator, smiling, as she went to the closet and took out some glasses and nice sandwiches. "Won't you have a lunch?"

"Thank ye, ma'am." And Ralph's eyes glistened as she poured out the tempting draught, which he swallowed without a moment's hesitation. Another and another followed, his heart growing warmer with each glass, until Marguerite saw the advantage she had gained, and said, as she filled it again, for the fourth time,

"Now, Ralph, we might be very good friends, if you were not so shy, and afraid to tell me anything."

"Shy, am I? That's where you're mistaken, I tell ye. Ralph Riley an't 'fraid o' nobody!"

"Why didn't you tell me, then, what I asked you just now?"

"'Cause I did n't feel like it."

"O, now you're a nice fellow, you mean to tell me, don't you?"

"Yes, I'll tell ye anything, only what his ruv'ence told me not to."

"What was that, Ralph?"

"About them young — O, I forgot — 't an't nothin'."

"There, Ralph, I told you, just now, you was afraid to tell."

"I an't 'fraid, neither; but I swared, on my knees, I would n t."

"I am glad you keep your promise so well ; but, as I know all about it, now, it will do no harm for us to talk it over, you know," said the crafty Jesuit.

"Do you really, though?" asked Ralph, brightening up at the pleasant idea of such a confidant.

"Ask Father Bernaldi if I don't," replied she.

"Well, then, maybe you can tell me who 'tis he wanted me to watch here." Ralph spoke in a low tone ; but Marguerite started as though smitten by an unseen hand. Recovering herself instantly, she replied, carelessly,

"It's Ellen, I suppose. But what did he want you to watch her, for?"

"O, 'cause he said she's gettin' some strange notions into her head, and so he wants me to tell him all she says and does."

"She is rather strange! But, Ralph, you won't tell him anything only what I tell you to, will you?"

"No, I won't, that's a fact," replied the half-drunken gardener.

"What did he say about the children, Ralph?"

"O, he told me all 'bout 'em ;—how their mother died, and how the darned old heretics tried to steal 'em, and how he'd put 'em in here, so they could n't find 'em. You know all 'bout it, I s'pose."

"Yes, that I do!" she exclaimed, while her lip curled with contempt for him who had thus set a spy upon her actions ; for rightly she conjectured that *she* was the one to be watched.

"You and I can talk these things over together some other time, Ralph, now we understand each other ; but I must see

to the children, now. Perhaps you can come over this afternoon, when I am not so busy."

"Yes'm, I will," said Ralph, as he left the cottage, with a somewhat unsteady step.

"So it has come to this, at last!" murmured Marguerite, sinking into a chair, and covering her face with both hands. "He whom I trusted in my youth only to be betrayed, and whose every word has since been my law, degrades me even to his servant! Suspects strange notions, does he? Well he may, while *he* is my counsellor and guide! What a blind fool I have been, all my days! One lesson, though, I will not forget. The cunning and guile he has taught me shall now be practised on himself, and he shall yet learn what it is to be outwitted by a woman!"

CHAPTER XX.

“Thou hast prevaricated with thy friend,
By underhand contrivances undone me.”

ROWE.

NOTWITHSTANDING the business which called Bernaldi away was important, exceedingly so, and at any other time would have engrossed all his thoughts and energies, he left the chateau reluctantly, and in no very enviable mood. So many years had Marguerite been in his service, never hesitating or wavering in her obedience to his unquestioned authority, he had looked upon her as a life-bound slave. That she should *dare* indulge for a moment in such feelings as she confessed to him, was no less a matter of surprise than vexation. But, situated as she was towards him, with so many dark secrets in her keeping, it would not be safe to place her beyond his influence. To one cold, dark spot *would* he consign her, did not his craven heart fear detection.

“A truce to these thoughts!” exclaimed he, at length, as he proceeded rapidly on his journey; “her insolence shall be punished if I don’t find her in good subjection when I return; but now I have more important business to attend to.” And he drew from his pocket a neatly-folded letter, on which was inscribed, in a fair and delicate hand, his own name. The

self-satisfied air with which he unfolded and re-read the little missive, and the smile of triumph which gradually broke over his face as he pondered its contents, showed that here, at least, success was his. Well might he smile exultingly,—for Emilie De Vere was no slight conquest, and she it was who had written the note he held in his hand, signifying her readiness to enter a conventual life, if her father could be persuaded to consent to it. To this condition the priest gave not the slightest heed; for well he knew that, her mind once made up to this course, it mattered little whether the haughty Lord De Vere consented or not. Her large fortune was now at her own disposal; and, though at her father's death it would be considerably increased, he was disposed to adopt the old adage, "A bird in the hand," etc., and secure the treasure while yet within his grasp. Her implied determination to abide by her father's decision caused only a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, as Bernaldi thought how utterly weak were all such influences when brought within the pale of the confessional.

What rival *need* the confessor fear? Does he not hold unlimited power over the body and soul of his deluded subjects? So, at least, reasoned Lady Emilie's confessor, as he drew near Ravenswood, whose extensive parks and highly-cultivated grounds would so soon become the property of the church he served. His own share of the spoils did not, of course, enter into the thoughts of the godly man!

"I would see your master, Lord De Vere," said Bernaldi to the servant who answered his summons.

"Lord De Vere is in the library. Will your reverence wait upon him there?" replied the latter.

"If he so desires;" and Bernaldi followed the man, who ushered him, without ceremony, into his lordship's presence.

That nobleman turned, frowningly, to his servant, to rebuke the sudden intrusion; but, seeing who the visitor was, he advanced, with extended hand, and cordially welcomed the holy father.

"You have really surprised me in dishabille," said he, glancing at his dressing-gown and slippers; "but John does not often play me such a trick, or I should be better prepared for him."

"It is I who should apologize," replied Bernaldi, "for so unceremoniously intruding myself; but I supposed your servant was obeying your directions in inviting me hither, and so followed him without hesitation."

"We will dispense with further compliments on this subject," said his lordship, smiling and motioning Bernaldi to a seat, while he resumed the one from which he had risen. "Your presence is always welcome, but particularly so just at this time. My daughter Emilie has strangely altered since Sir Charles' death, and obstinately persists in her determination to immure herself in a convent."

"So she writes me," said Bernaldi, showing him the letter, "and I thought it advisable to confer with you on the subject before I see her."

"Very thoughtful, indeed, in you, most excellent father; I was not aware, though, that she had written to you concerning it. You have great influence over her, and I trust will be able to dissuade her from a course which will bring wretchedness to my heart and home."

"Certainly, my dear sir; your lordship may depend upon

my doing all within my power for your interest. But what does Lady Emilie say to all your arguments and entreaties?"

"She has assured me that she will never take such a step without my approval, though her happiness depends upon it. Sometimes I think the separation would not be so painful to me as to see her so melancholy and sad. Her heart seems buried in Sir Charles' grave. What would you advise me to do or say?"

"Really, my lord, I have not reflected sufficiently to advise you. Doubtless, the fervent piety and strict religious devotion of the sisterhood would have great effect in tranquillizing Lady Emilie's mind, and, perhaps, might lead her into right views of the duty she owes her only parent."

"O, if I could only hope for such a result!" exclaimed the unhappy father; "but, supposing it were so, when once she has cast her lot with them, she cannot go back."

"Let her, then, enter the novitiate," cunningly suggested the priest; "there, for one year, she will have unrestricted liberty to go and come at pleasure; and, surely, in that time she must relent."

Had not his lordship been overcome with mental anguish, he must have noticed the searching look which accompanied these words. Bernaldi was a little fearful that he had ventured too far in this his first interview; but Lord De Vere thought only of the grief of parting with his only child, even for one year.

"Go now to her," cried he, at length, rapidly pacing up and down the room; "save her from this fate, and you shall

have my eternal gratitude; ay, and more than that, too," touching, significantly, his purse.

Bernaldi assumed a look of mingled grief and indignation. "Have I, then, fallen so low in your lordship's estimation," said he, "that you hope to *bribe* me to accomplish that which the holy mother knows I would *die* now to do!"

"Forgive me, most worthy father! I never for a moment doubted the purity of your intentions, or meant to insinuate aught against your perfect uprightness; but my whole fortune would be worthless to me, separated from that dear child; indeed, I could scarce hope to survive it;" and the proud, haughty man hid his face in his hands, and wept like a child.

"Do not, my dear sir," whispered the priest, "allow yourself to give way to such grief. Possibly this dreaded evil may be averted, and Lady Emilie restored to herself again. I will seek her, and use all my influence in your behalf,"—and he left the still weeping father, and noiselessly glided to Lady Emilie's boudoir. For a moment he stood gazing at the scene before him, his heart bounding with ecstasy that the beautiful being who knelt there, absorbed in such heavenly meditations, would soon be within his power. The robes of mourning, which she still wore in remembrance of the dead, gave to her colorless face an almost ethereal beauty, while the deep devotion that was now burning within her beamed forth from her dark eyes with holy light. Bernaldi must have been more than mortal to look upon her thus unmoved, knowing that, by cautious management, the prize might be secured; but he felt equal to the task, and approached her with the easy assurance of one who is confident of success.

"Benedicite!" he solemnly pronounced, laying his hand on her head, as she arose.

"Thanks, good father," she humbly replied.

"What have been thy thoughts, my daughter, while kneeling here before the cross? Does earth still bind thee to its sordid pleasures, or hast thou already a foretaste of the joys which belong only to those who crucify the flesh, that so their hearts may be purified?"

"I am in a state of doubt and perplexity, most holy father," Lady Emilie replied. "To the world and its vanities I am indeed dead; but, for my father's sake, must I not still mingle in its pleasures? It is to decide this question that I wished so earnestly to see you, my spiritual guide."

"What says the holy word, my daughter? 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.' The ever-blessed and holy mother of Jesus will not suffer aught to come between her love and thine. You cannot be truly her disciple till you are willing to cast every earthly lust at her feet, and do *whatsoever* she commands you."

"Though torture and death were in my path," cried the infatuated girl, "I could fearlessly meet them all, to be thought worthy a humble place among the sisterhood of saints; but my father! O, my father! who could fulfil my duties to him?"

"You have no duties, my daughter, aside from those you owe the church; and this remnant of earthly affection is the very sin you must crucify."

"And so I will," murmured she, falling on her knees before the crucifix. "Blessed Mother, hear me, as I surrender this last tie at thy command, henceforth to be thine only!"

"Amen!" solemnly added the priest; "now, indeed, thy

home should be among the holy ones, whose life on earth is but a type of eternal rest and joy!"

"My heart is ready, holy father, if you but point the way."

"I would spare your noble father's feelings," answered the Jesuit, "as far as we can, consistently. I have already proposed to him that you spend one year as a novice before you take the veil which separates you from the world. And thus he may be won, by witnessing your calm and happy life, to yield you up with gladness to your glorious destiny."

"How kind and thoughtful in you! But he — what did he say? *will* he consent?" she asked, eagerly.

"He will, without doubt. And now that your mind is settled, and at rest about your duty, I will return again to Lord De Vere, whom I left in the library; and this evening arrangements can be made for your removal to the peaceful and quiet home you have so wisely chosen."

"Then will my prayers be answered," exclaimed the fair enthusiast, "when, united by more than mortal vows, I clasp to my heart those holy sisters, whose pure and spotless lives it shall ever be my study to imitate."

CHAPTER XXI.

“For he
That sows in craft does reap in jealousy.”

MIDDLETON.

TEN years, in rapid and noiseless flight, have passed away, and, save in our little captives, no outward change is visible in and about the chateau. True, a few more wrinkles have been added to Bernaldi's face, and silvery hairs are here and there sprinkled in his dark locks; true, the bishop's form is more bent, and age comes creeping on with faltering step and hidden mien, but so gradually does it make its dark inroads, that all *seems* unchanged. Ralph is still the honest, stupid gardener, watching with jealous care the unfolding bud whose germ was engrafted in his heart as he caught the wee toddling thing in his arms at the cottage door, and whose daily-increasing beauty and loveliness have been his constant and almost only delight. There he stands now, with his chin resting upon his spade, seemingly in deep and anxious thought; for now and then a big tear drops from under those shaggy brows, and a sigh deep and long bursts from his true heart. Softly the door of the arbor uncloses, and a perfect little vision of loveliness peeps out, and, tripping lightly along,

clasps his great hand, with a joyous, childish laugh that she has for once surprised him.

"O, you rogue!" he exclaimed; "I bleve you're a farey, and jumped out o' that bush to scare me."

"What is a fairy, Ralph?" said she, after a hearty laugh at his exclamation.

"O, they're real little beauties, I tell ye, that live in flowers and bushes; and sometimes they bring us good things."

"O, I wish I could see one!" cried Myrtie. "What do they look like?"

"Like you, only they an't half so putty."

"Like me, Ralph! Why, I could not live in a flower!" and she looked a little puzzled, and a very little angry, at this seeming slight to her important growth.

"Wal, I most wish you could, 'cause then I'd hide ye where nobody could n't find ye;" and then he muttered, in an under tone, "I say it's a shame to shut her up in that 'tarnal old convent!"

"Did you say they give us good things, Ralph?"

"Yes, duckey, sometimes."

"What, everything we ask them to?"

"Wal, I should think they'd give *you* putty much anything you wanted," answered the partial gardener.

"O, I wish I *could* see one!" cried Myrtie again; "I know what I'd ask 'em to give me."

"Wal, what's that, duckey?"

She put her mouth close to Ralph's ear, and whispered something that made him start.

"Why, what put that into your head?" he asked, looking at her with surprise.

"O, Charlie has told me all about it," said she, and her little face grew very sad; "but we mean to run away, when we are bigger, and find her."

"Hush don't speak so loud," said Ralph. "If his ruv'rence should hear you talk so, he'd put you where I should n't see you agin, I tell ye."

"Yes, but he don't know it, and Margery don't know it, and nobody don't know it but you. Charlie said I might tell *you*, 'cause you would n't tell nobody, would you?"

"I'd sooner cut my head off!" exclaimed Ralph, warmly. "No, ducky, you need n't be afraid to tell Ralph Riley anything; I'd go to purgatory this minit for ye."

Myrtie had had sufficient evidence of that before, and she knew intuitively that her confidence in him was not misplaced. She threw her fair arms lovingly around his great neck, and her sunny ringlets contrasted strangely with his tangled locks; but what cared she, while his was the only heart, save her brother's, upon which she could lean in *perfect* trust? "O, Ralph," said she, "you're a dear, good Ralph!" And then she whispered, "When we go, Charlie and I, you shall go too, — won't you?"

"Yes, ducky," said he, more to quiet her than anything else.

Ralph's unfailing devotion to the sweet little girl had won for him Marguerite's *special* favor, and she had confided to him, what she dared not to any other, the story of the orphans, and her own wicked part in their abduction. Her failing health, admonishing her of the uncertainty of life, had brought, with thoughts of death, bitter reflections on her past conduct. The fountains of her heart had been opened by the

pure, innocent affection of the children she had so cruelly deprived of a mother's love, and, now that she must inevitably leave them, she shuddered at their fate, and longed to restore them even to that hated heretic mother. For herself, she knew no other religion than the priest had taught her; but for the little ones, who could scarcely be more dear were they her own, she desired something *purser* and better. What that something should be, she could not tell; but there lay hidden in her heart a secret remembrance of the pious words and lovely example of the gentle pastor's wife, whom she had often seen and heard while at Squire Clayton's, and she felt persuaded that Charlie and Myrtie would be *safer* under such influences than in the convent and monastery to which Bernaldi was soon to consign them. She had never dared give utterance to such thoughts, even at the confessional, though for such an omission she feared her soul might be lost; but she distrusted Bernaldi, and to no other would he allow her to confess. The secret, therefore, remained with her, and her heart was filled with burning thoughts and resolves. To Ralph, the only one about her in whom she had any confidence, she had told all she dared; but to the children themselves she had never mentioned the subject, though often importuned by Charlie, who retained a vivid recollection of his mother's agony when he was taken from her. The little fellow had received such threats from Bernaldi, that now it was only in whispered conferences with Myrtie that he dared mention his mother at all. She—little, confiding creature!—kept nothing from Ralph, and so he was made the depository of all her sage thoughts on the subject. The faithful gardener would sooner die than betray her trust, and his honest heart,

it must be confessed, wavered somewhat in its allegiance to his "ruv'rence," as he listened with indignation to the story of their wrongs.

Bernaldi's quick instinct detected something wrong in the atmosphere about him ; but fear made his servants, for once, as wary as himself, and he still remained ignorant of the change which was gradually taking place in the hearts of his dependents. He, however, thought it advisable to place Charlie at once within the walls of the cloister adjoining the chateau, where his own influence would be felt more strongly, and he could more easily control the boy's thoughts and feelings.

On the very afternoon when Myrtie clung so lovingly to her rough protector and confidant, Bernaldi passed them on his way to the cottage, to make known his determination to Marguerite. He found her reclining languidly in her easy-chair, her wan features growing a shade paler with each successive visit, which, of late, had been infrequent, and deep dejection visible in every lineament of her usually calm and stoical face. On a stool near her Charlie sat reading aloud to beguile her weariness, and now and then stopping to express his earnest sympathy in her evident suffering. 'T was strange to see the thoughtfulness with which this boy of fourteen watched her varying emotions, changing, with each mood, his reading or remarks ; strange, too, was it to see the heartless, intriguing, guilt-stained Jesuit transformed into the sad, sorrowful, repentant woman ! But such a scene had no power to soften the obdurate heart of the priest, who now stood before them, secretly rejoicing in the misery he was about to inflict upon them. He was jealous of Marguerite's affection for these

children ; not that he cared aught for her whom he had long since cast off as a worn-out slave, but that his own power over her should be supplanted by a mere boy, he could not endure. Nor did the evident shrinking with which they received his salutation escape the keen observation of this Jesuit. He had before noticed this, and now he would have his revenge, by separating them forever.

"I am glad to find you looking so comfortable and happy," said he, smilingly, seating himself to his task. "You are certainly improving, Marguerite ; we shall have you out again before long, I trust."

"I cannot say that I either expect or wish for such a result to my illness," she replied, sadly.

"I am sorry to hear you say so," said Bernaldi. "I did hope to find you in better spirits than when I saw you last, for I wish to talk with you about Charlie, here ; he is quite outgrowing your care, I think."

The poor invalid drooped her head and sighed, for she understood too well his meaning ; while Charlie looked up, wonderingly. Without appearing to notice either, the Jesuit continued,

"You have proved yourself a faithful teacher, Marguerite, and Charlie an apt scholar, in attaining a proficiency far beyond his years ; but now his mind needs a wider scope, and Father Francis will henceforth have the guidance of his untamed spirit."

"When do you wish him to go ?" asked she, faintly.

"He may as well go at once ; it will relieve you from a part of your burden."

A portion of her old spirit returned, as she replied, with a flashing eye,

“Burden, indeed! You would take from me my only comfort, and leave me to solitude and death! Speak plainly; it needs no smooth words to conceal your meaning.”

“Very well,” coolly answered he, “if you wish for plain words, you shall have them. That boy remains no longer with you, but goes with me *now* to his future abode. So make yourself ready, sir, immediately.”

“O, good father!” pleaded the boy, with quivering lip, “please don’t take me from Margery now! Who can read to her, pray for her, and attend to all her little wants, when I am gone? She has been good and kind to me; let me stay with her till she gets well, and then I am ready to go wherever you wish. Grant me just this one favor, I beg!” Charlie had fallen on his knees, in his earnestness, and Marguerite sank beside him, bathed in tears.

“Silence!” thundered Bernaldi; “no more of this nonsense! You have been with her too long already; now gather what things you have, and come with me. It is time you had a master.”

“Stay, Marguerite,” added he, as she rose to follow Charlie out of the room; “I have a few words for *your* ear. I have not been blind or deaf lately, and, though you seek to deceive me, remember, your infamy shall be visited on your own head. It is for this I remove the boy from you; and the girl will soon follow; for, mark you—your doom is *sealed!*”

“I scorn alike your threats and your own polluted self!”

exclaimed she, shaking her finger towards him. "Beware how you incense me!"

"Ha! ha! What can you do?" muttered Bernaldi, as Charlie returned.

No word was spoken, but in one long, agonizing embrace Marguerite parted with the boy, whose pure and innocent childhood had awakened the first throb of contrition in her heart, and made life sweet to her.

"It is right — it is just!" cried she, as her aching eyes gazed longingly at the last glimpse of his loved form. "The bitterness of this moment but speaks to me of the anguish and woe of that mother's heart whom we desolated. O, that I could restore them again to her bosom! Then would I die in peace. But how shall I endure this lonely existence? — the little voices all hushed and silent — (for Myrtie will soon go; *he* said it) — and these echoing walls only breathing into my ear remorse — remorse — remorse! I will have revenge! *Revenge!* — Ah, yes; *he* shall yet feel it, and by my hand too, feeble and powerless as he deems me. I know a way to reach his heart, and it shall be done. Holy Virgin, aid me in one last effort to expiate my crimes on the altar of *justice and truth!*"

CHAPTER XXII.

“I grant him bloody,
Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,
Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin
That has a name.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“WHERE are you going, Charlie?” cried Myrtie, gazing at the little bundle in her brother’s hand, as he emerged from the cottage path with Bernaldi.

“I don’t know!” said he, and, throwing his arms about her neck, he burst into a passionate flood of weeping.

“Come, no more scenes!” said the priest, drawing him from her. “You make a perfect baby of yourself. You’re going where you will soon learn to be a man, I hope.”

“Will you please to tell me, good father,” asked Myrtie, in her most winning tones, “what Charlie is crying so for, and what you are going to do with him?”

The priest looked a little disconcerted at the fair questioner, but, seeing Ralph, he turned away to give him some directions, without answering her. The words which Charlie then whispered in her ear caused her childish heart to swell with grief and indignation, and together they mingled their sobs and tears, for this, their first separation. Charlie was the first to speak.

"Myrtie!" whispered he, "we shall never play or study together again, and perhaps I shall not see your dear face for a long time; but promise me that you will remember all I have said to you about *her*, — our own mother, — and never forget that some day we shall go and find her. But, for your life, you must not tell *any* one, except Ralph."

"I shan't forget anything that you have told me," said she, looking into his face, with tearful eyes; "but what *can* I do without you, Charlie? O, I shall die, I know I shall!" and again the tears burst forth afresh.

"No, darling, you are a little girl yet, and I am not much older, but we must not cry nor be childish; we must try to grow old as fast as we can, so that we can learn some way to find out our dear mother."

"What's all this whimpering about?" said the priest, suddenly interrupting them; "I told you, just now, I'd have no more scenes! So, bid your brother good-by, Myrtie, and go with Ralph. — Remember my instructions!" added he, looking at the latter, "and do everything as I bid you!"

"Yes, sir, yur ruv'rence!" answered that worthy personage, with an emphatic nod of the head, and leading the little girl towards the cottage.

"Now, sir," said Bernaldi, addressing Charlie, as they proceeded to the monastery, "you must lay aside all your foolish whims, for henceforth I am to be your *sole* master, and I shall expect perfect obedience from you. There," pointing to the dark, grim-looking building before them, "is your home and you must never wish to leave it, for such a thing will not be allowed. You are now to commence life in earnest, and I trust we shall have no difficulty with you."

Charlie looked at the gray walls above him, at the cheerless, barren spot, with its high enclosure, that was hereafter to limit his enjoyment of nature, and his heart grew old within him. He dared not trust his lips to utter a reply to his master, but walked silently within its gloomy portals, the light of hope fast dying out in his young heart.

After a few moments' whispered conference with the only occupant of the room into which they were ushered, Bernaldi came forward with his companion, and introduced his protégé to Father Francis, who, as he told Charlie, would have the special charge of him in his (Bernaldi's) absence.

Father Francis, though many years younger than Bernaldi, had a repulsive, sinister expression about his face, that caused Charlie to shrink with aversion from his proffered hand, as he accosted him.

"Really, my lad," said he, noticing the movement, and divining at once its cause, "you have some spirit, I see. Well, never mind, we shall understand each other better, by and by." Then, turning to Bernaldi, who stood by, with darkened brow, he added, "I suppose you have given the boy some instructions as to his conduct here."

"No, I have not," answered the priest; "I thought it best to leave him to your excellent guidance. You see," said he, in a tone not intended to reach Charlie's ears, "what you have to deal with, and need not hesitate to use any means to curb him."

"I see — I understand," replied the prior, turning again to Charlie.

He, poor boy, had been silently contemplating his strange and unhappy position during the short conversa-

tion, and, looking up ingenuously into the face of his new friend, he exclaimed, "Indeed, sir, I did not mean to offend you!"

"Very likely," was the ungracious answer; "but we suffer no apologies to be made here, so you will please remember that your like or dislike is of no consequence to me."

Charlie, thus rudely repulsed, ventured not another word; but his heart turned longingly to the little cottage, with Myrtie and Marguerite to love him; and still more yearningly to one who even then seemed dearer to him than aught else, save Myrtie. Courage, noble, brave boy! the strength and hope which springs up within thee, at thoughts of that sacred name, come from above, where, at this moment, her softly-breathed prayers are ascending for thee, her first-born, and gently falling like dew upon thy sinking heart!

Charlie instinctively grasped Bernaldi's hand, as the latter rose to go and leave him in this cheerless place; for even his cold face seemed pleasant to the boy, now so friendless. But, secure of his victim, the heartless priest had no longer occasion for reserve or concealment, and, angrily pushing him away, he exclaimed:

"No more o' your puling around me, you young brat! I've had enough of you, I hope. As I hated your vile heretic mother, so do I hate you; and now you've got to smart for all the bother you've been to me! Yes, and that little pale-faced wretch of a sister of yours has got to take it too, I reckon! We'll see who's master round here now!"

So saying, he left the room, followed by Father Francis. Then did that young, o'erburdened heart yield to its fate, and Charlie fell senseless to the floor.

How sweet and happy were the dreams that came o'er him then!— a fond, loving face, beautiful as an angel's, hovering in earnest tenderness over his couch, while words of love, whose tones were sweeter than music, fell upon his ear, calling him back to childhood again. Stretching forth his hands, he murmured, "Mamma, dear mamma! I'm so tired!"

"What does the boy mean?" said a voice near him, while more vigorously they applied restoratives to bring back his young life to its woe.

"He's coming to, I reckon," replied another.

"Better let him die, while he's about it," said a third; "he'll never have an easier time."

"That won't do," said the first speaker; "he's wanted for something *special*, I should think, from the charge Father Francis gave me."

"Likely he's got money, then," added the other.

"Of course; or else he would n't be of any account here," was the reply, in a bitter tone.

"Take care! The walls have ears, remember!"

But the caution came too late. The walls echoed faithfully, and the poor brother had to atone most severely for his indiscretion.

Meanwhile, the object of their immediate solicitude was slowly reviving under their efficacious treatment; but, as his bright, happy dreams vanished, and that sweet voice gave place to the discordant sounds about him, he feared to uncloset his eyes, lest he should find himself surrounded by evil spirits. Gradually, however, the scenes of the last few hours came to his remembrance, and he shuddered as he thought of Bernaldi's parting words.

"Come, rouse up, my boy!" spoke one, not unkindly, as he noticed the movement; and Charlie ventured to raise one inquiring glance to his face. What he saw there seemed to inspire confidence, for he held out his hand, and said, plaintively, "Will you be my friend, now I have n't any one else?"

Father Ambrose smoothed his hair gently, and looked pityingly into the dark, earnest eyes raised to his own, as he answered, "Why do you say that, child? You are too young to be friendless."

"But the good father has taken me away from Margery and Myrtie, the only ones I had, and brought me here to live, where he says I must always stay, and not see them any more."

"Who do you mean by the 'good father'?"

"Why, Father Bernaldi, that came here with me."

"And who is Margery and Myrtie?"

"Myrtie is my darling little sister, and Margery takes care of us and teaches us;—that is, she did; but Father Bernaldi says Myrtie is going somewhere else to live, too."

"Humph! here's some more of *his* tricks, I reckon," said the monk, aside.

"What did you say, sir?" asked Charlie.

"Nothing; what is your name, my boy?"

"Charlie."

"Charlie what?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Don't know! What do you mean by that, Charlie?"

"I know I had another name, once; but it is so long ago that I have forgotten it, and no one about here knows."

"That is very strange!" exclaimed Ambrose, his interest

in the boy growing deeper every moment. "Where did you come from?"

A momentary flush crossed Charlie's face as he replied, "I don't know, exactly; and, if I did, I must not tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because — because" — Charlie hesitated — "I should n't dare to."

The monk knew very well *why* he dared not tell, and forbore to press him further; though he resolved to befriend the boy when he should learn his history.

None who had ever known Charles Duncan could fail to recognize Charlie's resemblance to his father; but in him the mother's sweetness of disposition was united to the father's vivacity, and Charlie, now in his fifteenth year, was a beautiful, affectionate, high-spirited boy. He felt keenly Bernaldi's injustice and cruelty in separating him from Myrtie, the only one he had to love; and while he dared not oppose him, whom he had been taught to obey, the half-formed thoughts and resolves floating in his mind for the last few years began to shape themselves into one great purpose. He carefully studied those about him, scanned each face with trembling solicitude; but, save Father Ambrose, found in them only the index to cold, unfeeling hearts. Vainly did he endeavor to draw forth one kind look or smile; souls and bodies seemed alike congealed in that frigid atmosphere, and his own longing heart returned to him void, finding no sympathy, or humanity even, there. Father Ambrose alone, of all that monkish clan, looked with kindly feelings upon the friendless boy, and watched with increasing interest the noble spirit which bore him manfully through trials that would have

caused many an older cheek to pale, and harder hearts to grow faint. But days and weeks passed ere he could win from Charlie more of his story than he had told him in his first interview; so strongly had Bernaldi impressed the boy's fears with his repeated threats and warnings.

One morning, however, after an unusually severe penalty had been inflicted upon Charlie, — for Father Francis delighted in heaping insults on him, — he sought the monk's cell, quivering under a sense of the indignity and injustice of which he was the victim, and, throwing himself down, exclaimed, passionately,

“O, Father Ambrose, I would rather *die* than live in such a place as this!”

“Poor boy!” replied the monk, compassionately, “I don't much wonder that you feel so; but be careful that no one hears you say it beside me, lest it should make matters worse.”

“Are you, then, *really* a good friend to me?” asked Charlie, brightening up a little.

“Better than you are willing to let me be, I fear; else you would tell me more about yourself.”

“If I thought it would be safe,” said Charlie, looking earnestly into the face of the other, as though he would read his thoughts, “I should be *so* glad to tell you all I know; and then, perhaps, you could advise me, and help me too. But, if Father Bernaldi should find it out, he would kill me and Myrtie too, for he said so;” and Charlie lowered his voice, looking around fearfully.

“He shall never know anything you confide to me,” said Ambrose, encouragingly, “depend upon that; and, if I can do

aught to make your life easier or happier, I shall rejoice in it."

"Thank you, O, thank you, a thousand times!" cried Charlie. "I will trust you, for I know you will not betray me!"

Tears, which had refused to start at threats, punishments, and even insults, flowed plentifully at these words of kindness, and Charlie wept for a few moments unrestrained.

"There!" said Father Ambrose, gently, "that will do now; you know we cannot be together long, or it will be noticed, and we shall be separated entirely. Have you heard from your sister since you came here?"

"No," replied Charlie, "and it is that which grieves me most now. I have asked Father Bernaldi, but he will tell me nothing about her, only that I am not to see her again."

"I don't know about that," muttered the monk; "others can plan as well as he. Where do you say she is, or was?"

"In the little cottage at the end of the garden; but Ralph could tell you where she is now. O, if I could see Myrtie!" and Charlie's eyes sparkled with the thought.

"Well, don't get too much excited about it — we'll see. Who is Ralph?"

"Why, he's the gardener, and a dear, good fellow too; he'll do anything Myrtie asks him to. I shouldn't wonder if he has tried to find me before now."

"No doubt," said the monk. "Now, if you will go and keep perfectly quiet, I will see what I can do to relieve your first trouble; then, perhaps, you will find me to be a friend you can trust, and will open your heart freely to me."

What cared Charlie now for cold words, or colder looks, as

he went, with a light heart, about his daily task. Would he not soon, perhaps this very day, see the bright, sunny face that had ever been near his, and forget all his sorrows in her sweet, loving caresses? His heart began to grow young again, and, for the first time in that forlorn abode, a smile lighted up his sad, boyish face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“Farewell ! God knows when we shall meet again ;
I have a faint, cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life.”

SHAKSPEARE.

“THIS here ’s bad bisness, now I tell ye,” growled Ralph, as he entered Marguerite’s room, hastily, after Charlie’s departure. But she heeded him not, as she sat there with her face buried in her hands, in an attitude of despair. Ralph coughed and hemmed several times, impatiently, and at length ventured to touch her gently on the shoulder ; yet she moved not.

“Holloa, there, Ellen !” he screamed, opening the door, “come quick, — your mistress has fainted !”

“She an’t no mistress o’ mine, I ’d have you to know,” muttered the girl, as she dashed some cold water into Marguerite’s face, and pulled her rather rudely on the sofa.

“Take care,” said he, “or I ’ll report ye to his ruv’rence.”

“Much he cares for her now !” replied she, sneeringly, for she had of late been an eaves-dropper during Bernaldi’s visits, and knew pretty well how matters stood. “There, she’s

coming to now, so I'll leave her to you, 'cause I've got plenty o' work to do, without fussing over her!" and she slammed the door after her, with no slight noise.

"Wal, now, if that 'an't too bad!" said Ralph to himself; "this poor thing 'll die, and nobody to care for her, neither."

"Is that you, Ralph?" sighed Marguerite, unclosing her eyes, and looking around the room.

"Yes, it 's me, and nobody else; do you feel better now?"

"I believe so; what has happened? O, I remember now," and she placed her hand over her heart to still its throbbings.

"As I was sayin' jest now, it 's mighty bad bisness, in my 'pinion, this is," said Ralph, shaking his head.

"It 's dreadful, Ralph; but think how their poor mother must have suffered when we stole them away from her!"

"O, wal," said he, soothingly, "she was a heretic, you know, and it was for their good you took 'em away."

"No, Ralph, I cannot claim a good motive for that wicked deed," said she, earnestly, "though the Holy Mother knows how sincerely and bitterly I have repented it."

"Is Charlie goin' to stay long in the 'St. Augustine'?" asked Ralph.

"I suppose so; for Father Bernaldi said that henceforth he would be under the care of Father Francis."

"Then I can see him sumtimes," said Ralph; "but my putty birdie — where 'll she go?"

"I don't know; Father Bernaldi has n't told me yet."

"Seems to me I shan't stan' it when she 's gone;" and Ralph's voice trembled. "Why don't he let you keep her a spell longer? She 's too young to go among them old stiff nuns."

"He's afraid I shall spoil her, as he says I have Charlie," replied Marguerite, with a curling lip.

"There an't a better boy nowheres," exclaimed Ralph, energetically; "but they'll break his spirit, I'm afeared."

"That's what they intend to do, Ralph, and Myrtie's too. I know but too well what a convent life is; and, were it not that I have other hopes for her, I would sooner see her die than go there. Ay, 't would be a kindness even to take her life."

Ralph started to his feet; he had never seen Marguerite so excited before, and he feared she was losing her senses.

"Ralph!" said she, solemnly, "my life is almost ended, and there are none to care how soon it may be; but, before I die, I have a great work to perform. This very hour, at the foot of that cross, I have vowed to accomplish it; and you, Ralph, are the only one that can aid me. Promise me, for Myrtie's sake, that you will."

"I'd a-most give up my soul for Myrtie now," said he.

"I know you would, Ralph; and your devotion to her has strengthened my purpose. But I'm too weak to talk any more now; don't, for your life, repeat anything I've said to you. Where's Myrtie?"

"She's here," he replied, looking out of the window; "but her poor little heart is broken partin' with Charlie; and when she comes to go herself I'm thinking 't will 'bout kill her."

He went out as he spoke; and, sitting on the door-step, — the very one where he had first taken the little girl to his arms and heart, — wept such tears as were never before wrung from his heart. He knew, though he dared not tell

Marguerite, in her excited state, that the next day his darling pet, whom he had watched so tenderly, would go among strangers; and what Marguerite had just said of a convent life sank deeply into his heart, and made him tremble still more for the fate of his treasure.

"What makes you so sad, Ralph?" asked Myrtie, coming to him, her own eyes red with weeping for the loss of her playmate.

"O dear, dear! I can't stan' this, no way!" burst from him, as he rushed furiously along the path to the chateau. Then turning, he ran back, and caught the wondering girl in his arms, and hugged her convulsively to his bursting heart.

"What *is* the matter, dear Ralph?" cried she.

"Matter! darlin', blessed birdie! Why, your old Ralph's heart 's a breakin', that's all!" groaned he.

"What for — because Charlie's gone?"

"No, no, not that, though I feel bad enough about it; or should, if 't wan't for sumthin' else."

"*Do* tell me what it is, Ralph; you know I shall pity you."

"It's yourself, birdie, that's to be pitied! What'll you do without Margery to take care of ye, and old Ralph to tend ye, and worship the very ground ye tread on?"

"Are you going away to leave me?" she asked, plaintively.

"No, duckey, I an't; but you've got to go, and leave my old heart to break!" And Myrtie felt the strong frame beneath her shake.

"Where am I going, Ralph?"

"I don't know, yet; but his ruv'rence said you would

go to-morrow. There, it's all out, now!" And tears again rolled down his sunburnt cheek.

"That's what Charlie meant when he told me to keep up good courage," said Myrtie, thoughtfully; "and he said, too, I mustn't be childish about it, but grow old fast, so that we could some day find out our dear mother! O, Ralph, don't feel so bad; 'cause you will go with us, and then we shall always live together."

He could not bear to sadden that young heart; so he replied, "Wal, duckey, these old knees shall bend every day and every night for ye, and it'll be mighty hard if suthin' don't come of it, I tell ye. But what can I do without you, birdie?"

"O, you will come and see me, and then we will have such a nice time! and may be I can come here, too."

"Poor little thing! Margery says they won't let me. But I know what I'll do," said Ralph, brightening up; "I'll see where you go, and maybe they'd hire me to work where I can catch a sight of your sweet face sumtimes, jest enough to keep the heart in me."

"But poor Margery, Ralph! How could you leave her all alone?"

"O dear, dear!" replied he, "I did n't think o' her! Wal, what shall I do, any way?" And again the cloud rested heavily upon his spirit.

"Stay here with dear Margery," answered the thoughtful child, "and ask Father Bernaldi to let you come and see me, sometimes. It won't be long, Ralph; for I mean to be so very good, the Blessed Virgin will answer our prayers — Charlie's and mine."

Ralph walked home in a state of bewilderment. He seemed beset with troubles from which he could not extricate himself. He had promised to stay with Margery, and aid her in something, he knew not what. And here was his birdie, the light of his eye, going he knew not where, with none to care for her as he had done. Vainly did the ragged slouched hat perform repeated precipitate journeys from his head to the ground, while with his fingers' ends he sought to scratch up some new idea from his cranium. In vain did he strike more vigorously his spade into the earth, as though a mine of knowledge might be hidden beneath. The mystery could not be solved; and the simple-hearted gardener was fairly lost in the darkness and sorrow with which he was surrounded. Suddenly, however, his face brightened; and, dropping his spade, he ran with all speed up the garden-walk to the chateau, and was soon knocking humbly at the door of the library.

"Come in," cried the bishop's voice. And Ralph stood trembling in the presence of the most holy father, twirling nervously the old hat around his fingers.

"Why, Ralph!" said the bishop, looking somewhat astonished at his appearance, "what brings you here, now?"

"If it please yur great ruv'rence," answered the gardener, "I'm troubled in here!" laying his broad hand on his breast.

"Ah, Ralph — what's the matter? Haven't you confessed, lately?"

"Most holy father, I have; but that don't reach it. I must go away from here; and I want your blessin' and a caracter," said Ralph, growing bolder.

"My blessing and a character!" replied the bishop.

"Surely, you are out of your senses, Ralph. Why do you wish to leave here?"

"Yur great ruv'rence will pardon what I shall say in answer to your question."

"Certainly, Ralph — say on."

"Wal, then, for more'n ten years I've worked faithful, here; nobody can say aught agin that."

"No, Ralph; you have been an honest, faithful fellow, I believe; but say on."

"The heart is clean gone out o' me!" said Ralph, while his voice shook with emotion, "and I can't do no more, no how."

"How's that? What do you mean, Ralph?" asked the bishop, more and more puzzled.

"Why, you see, holy sir, when the light that's kept these old eyes from fadin', and this lone heart from sinkin', is taken away, I shan't be good for nothin', sir."

"Speak plainer, Ralph; I don't understand you," said the other; who, however, did begin to divine the cause of his trouble, knowing the extraordinary affection existing between the rough being before him and the beautiful child.

"Wal, then, great ruv'rence, to be plain-spoken, I can't live here, no how, after my little birdie's gone."

"And why not, Ralph?" queried the bishop, to draw him out.

"Why not, indeed! Should n't I every mornin' listen for the song of my lark, and hear nothin' but the pitiful notes o' the birds in the woods, yonder? Should n't I every minit hear the pattin' o' little feet comin' to me, and see nothin' but old Towser a-walkin' round the garden? Should n't I

keep watchin' the door o' that arbor all day long to see the little face, brighter'n the sun to these eyes, come to cheer me, and watch the flowers grow? Shouldn't I ——"

"Stop, stop, Ralph, that'll do!" cried the bishop, laughing; "you are getting so enthusiastic, you forget yourself. No doubt you love this little 'birdie,' as you call her, and so do we — no one could help it. But that only makes us the more anxious to do everything for her good. You wouldn't want her to grow up in ignorance."

"*She* ignorant — my little birdie! You may call Ralph that — but not her — no, never!"

"You forget yourself, Ralph!" said the bishop, more sternly. "It is not for you to judge, but we, who know what is right. I shall expect you will, therefore, say no more about it, but go to your work — foolish fellow that you are."

Ralph made a hasty retreat to his own quarters, where he sat down, more troubled than ever. He thought of the cruel separation of the brother and sister; of the hard life the former must lead in the austere monastery to which he had gone; of the horrors of a convent life, as hinted at by Marguerite, which his "birdie" must now meet. And, it must be confessed, his respect for *all* "ruv'rences" decreased in the same proportion as his anxiety and grief for the children increased; for were they not really the cause of all this trouble?

He was in this state of mind when Bernaldi returned from the cloister whither he had conducted Charlie, and, in passing through the garden, saw Ralph in such deep meditation.

"How now, Ralph?" said he, accosting him; "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'!" answered the gardener, gruffly; "only I an't a-goin' to stay here another day, — darn *me* if I do!"

"Ha! ha! that's pretty well, after ten years' such service as you have had here! What's the trouble, now?"

"I say I can't stan' it no how nor no way, another day after my little birdie's gone — *that's* the trouble."

"O ho! that's the trouble, is it? But what are you going to do about it? You can't see her any more if you go away from here than if you stay."

"Wal, I shan't keep thinkin' all the time she's round me, as I should here."

"What if I should make a proposition to you, Ralph?" said Bernaldi, who, for various reasons, *could not* part with this man, — "what if I should say, if you'll do so and so, you may go and see Myrtie very often?"

"O, yur ruv'rence, yur blessed ruv'rence!" cried Ralph, falling on his knees, "that's all I'd ask to be yur servant forever. I'd walk on my hands and knees over burnin' pitch-forks; I'd ——"

"That'll do," said the priest; "I shall not require any such service; so you need not spend your breath talking about it. But when I want you to do certain things for me, which I will tell you some time, you must not flinch nor draw back. Will you remember?"

"Yur ruv'rence, I will remember everything, so that I can see my birdie sometimes, I tell ye."

Such a load as was lifted from Ralph's heart! Now he can know what treatment Myrtie meets with. Is she happy? does her heart still cling to him, her best friend? and a thousand other things, which only his noble heart could have

suggested. How earnestly did he watch for the moment when he could with safety run and communicate his happiness to the cottage inmates; and, as soon as that moment arrived, seeing Bernaldi leave the chateau, how he bounded through the path, like one almost crazed, and rushed into their quiet sitting-room, catching Myrtie up in his arms, and almost smothering her in his joy!

"O dear, dear!" cried he, "I can't stan' this no better 'n I could afore! Only think, birdie, yur old Ralph's goin' to see ye most every day!"

"What's that you say, Ralph?" exclaimed Marguerite, with eager joy.

"I say what I mean," answered the delighted fellow; "I'm going to see Myrtie very often; that's what his ruv'ence said. O, an't you glad, birdie?"

"Yes, indeed, Ralph," cried Myrtie, hugging him more closely.

"But, Ralph," said Marguerite, who could scarce believe her ears, "explain yourself; you cannot see Myrtie, if she goes into a convent."

"What, not if his ruv'ence gives me leave?" asked he, with a knowing look.

"Yes; but —"

"Yes, but nothin'; I tell ye he says I may. Now, an't ye glad, Margery? 'cause ye see you'll know all about Myrtie;" and he fairly capered — the huge fellow — round the room.

"Glad, Ralph! you can never know *how* thankful I am for such a hope:" exclaimed Marguerite, who saw how much this would aid her in carrying out her plans.

"Now, dear Margery, and you, too, dear Ralph, won't feel

so bad about my going, will you?" said Myrtie, thinking only of those she loved best; "but dear, *dear* Charlie — shan't I *ever* see him again?" and tears forced themselves down her cheeks, despite her efforts to prevent them.

"Yes, you shall, birdie, if I can manage it; so, don't cry any more about it." Ralph could see no trouble in anything now.

"Poor Charlie!" sighed Marguerite; "how his noble spirit will break, and his affectionate heart be crushed, among those heartless souls! But he shall yet be saved," added she, energetically; "I swear it before this cross, and you, Ralph — *they shall both be saved!*"

"That's good, I tell ye," joined in Ralph; "I wish I could help ye."

"And so you will; for, unless you are faithful, it cannot be done."

"Have n't I allers been, since I knew this birdie?"

"Yes, Ralph, and *you* will live to see your reward, while I must soon sink, and justly too, into an unnoticed and un-honored grave. But, O Blessed Virgin, spare me till justice is avenged!"

Myrtie did not comprehend all this, but she saw that Margery was unhappy, and, going gently to her side, she laid her sweet face, still wet with tears, upon the nurse's shoulder, exclaiming, "Dear, dear Margery, don't be so sad! I am sure the good father will let me come to see you, now you're so sick — and I love you so much, and Charlie's gone too."

"You don't know him as well as I, dear child," replied Margery; "I shall never hope to see my darling Myrtie again!" and she pressed her convulsively to her heart.

How quickly sped away the sorrowful moments — the last which united sinful, fallen nature to the guileless innocence of childhood! Marguerite found herself alone, she scarcely knew when or how; but that she was bereft, forsaken, did not every pulsation of her heart tell her? Now has her expiation commenced; and, but for the one burning desire to accomplish it to the utmost, she must have inevitably sank beneath consuming disease and grief. Faint not, erring woman! It may yet be that thy contrition will spread for thee a downy bed, on which to yield thy last breath in peace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ Now warm in love, now withering in thy bloom,
Lost in a convent’s solitary gloom.”

POPE.

NOTHING could be sweeter or more winning than the modest, humble manner in which Myrtie met the imperious demands of the lady superior of the convent where Bernaldi placed her. She had been there scarcely a month, and yet, despite her youth, she had been subjected to stinging sarcasm, insult, and even cruelty, “to break her in at once,” as that holy mother said. But her brave little heart withstood all these trials, and, ever repeating to herself Charlie’s last injunction, the present was overlooked, or patiently borne, in her bright hopes for the future. But not long could the loving heart of this fair, sunny little creature endure the chilling blasts around her. Courage and hope must alike yield to such adverse influences, unless, perchance, some kindred spirit breathes into her own its warm, gushing affection, and sustains through this terrible ordeal her untried soul.

Thrice had Ralph, true to his promise and himself, begged for admission within those barred gates; the inexorable portress had ever some ready excuse for disappointing him.

Sometimes Myrtie had "gone for a walk," or she was "out riding with the ladies," or "busy with her studies, and could not be interrupted;" till at length, in his despair, the poor fellow complained to his "ruv'rence," and besought his interference. Bernaldi, finding he could no longer be put off, accompanied him to the convent, and, placing Myrtie in his arms, told him to say all he wished quick, as the child must not be long delayed from her tasks.

O, what a world of meaning was there in the wild cry of mingled joy and grief with which she clasped her arms around that faithful neck! Naught but tears, which could not be restrained, spoke to the true heart beneath; and yet that heart, in bursting agony, drank in the tale of woe.

"My birdie, my poor, darling birdie!" at length he exclaimed; "they're killing you, — I know they are!"

Bernaldi stood by with lowering brow, and Myrtie dared only murmur, in reply,

"No they are not, but I'm so lonely without you, Ralph!"

"It is n't my fault, duckey, that I have n't seen you before. That cursed old hag at the gate would n't —"

"Stop!" thundered Bernaldi, in a voice which caused them both to start; "is this the way you would teach the child to regard those around her? You will conduct yourself very differently, sir, or your interviews with her are at an end."

"I did n't mean nothin', yur ruv'rence," cried Ralph, intimidated at such a threat; "but her little pale face and sad looks make me almost crazy."

"You did not come here to talk about her looks," replied Bernaldi, tartly, "but to encourage her to be a good girl, which I am afraid she has n't been since she came."

Ralph choked down the indignant reply which sprung to his lips at this insinuation, lest his "ruv'rence" should carry his threat into execution, and forbid his coming again to see Myrtie. So, concealing his emotion as much as possible, he whispered in Myrtie's ear,

"Keep up good courage, birdie; you shan't stay here always."

The little blue eyes answered him most expressively, as they beamed with thankful, hopeful love into his own. But Myrtie was learning to be discreet, and, with the dark eyes of the priest bent frowningly upon them, how could she pour her sorrows where most of all she longed to do?

So in silent embrace they sat, and save only in the spirit's deep utterance did each to the other tell its grief.

"Come," said the priest, growing impatient, "I have no more time to fool in this way. Bid your birdie, as you call her, good-by, Ralph, and we must return to the chateau; it's getting late."

One convulsive clasp around his neck, and a kiss in which the bitterness of that child-heart was concentrated, and Myrtie sank to the floor, cowering beneath her dress, that she might not see *him* go. 'T was strange to see that rough, uncouth being, as he walked slowly away (for Bernaldi had left him when he got him outside of the walls), turn, and, stretching forth his brawny arms, cry aloud, in the anguish of his spirit, till, weakened and overcome by grief, he would sit by the wayside, gazing with aching eyes at the walls which imprisoned his "birdie."

How long Myrtie had been crouching upon the floor of the desolate room she knew not, when she started to her feet with

surprise, as a gentle hand was laid upon her head, and a soft, pleasant voice asked, in accents of sympathy,

“What is it grieves this little girl so?”

She looked up into the sweet face of the strange lady, and, clasping her hands, said, earnestly,

“O, *he*’s gone, and now I have n’t any friends!”

“Who is he?”

“Why, Ralph, my only friend, — that is, except Margery and Charlie.”

“Poor child!” said the lady, pityingly; “well do I know the desolation this place brings to the heart. I will not ask you any more questions now” (for Myrtie was sobbing on her breast), “but after vespers, to-morrow, come to Sister Agnes’ cell, and we will talk together.”

“Are you Sister Agnes?” asked Myrtie, looking at the serge gown and cap of the nun.

“That is my name here,” sighed the other, thinking of the proud title by which the world had known her.

“O, I’m so glad to find somebody here that I can love!” exclaimed the warm-hearted little girl; “for I know I shall love you, Sister Agnes.”

“So you shall, my sweet child; and Sister Agnes will love you, too, very much. But be careful not to say anything about it before the others, or they may prevent my seeing you. Go, now, and keep up a good heart till to-morrow,” added the nun, affectionately kissing her.

Childhood’s drooping heart revived a little in this brief sunshine, and Myrtie went to her tasks reassured.

At the same time, in her private parlor, sat Bernaldi, in deep, earnest conversation with the lady superior.

"I don't see how we can prevent their meeting sometimes; it's the only hold I've got on him now, and a strong one it is, too, he'll do anything, no matter what, for the sake of seeing her."

"I shall look out that it happens but seldom, I promise you," replied the mother; "for she's hard enough now to subdue, and he'll only make her worse—the beastly fellow!"

"We can manage it better, by and by," continued the priest, "but for the present it will be necessary to humor him a little, or he may flinch from the business."

"Well, it must be as you say, I suppose."

"And, another thing," added Bernaldi, gently; "I would recommend you to be rather lenient towards her till we get through over there; it won't do to undertake too much at once, you know."

"I'm all obedience, holy father!" replied she, sarcastically. "The child shall be trotted on my knee every day, if you say so!"

"Come, come, mother! don't be vexed. You shall have your own way with her very soon; you know, as well as I, what my object is."

"Well, let *her* rest," said the lady; "but what about Sister Agnes? She's as incorrigible as ever, though I have tried every torture you suggested, till I thought she would die under my hands."

"May the devil take her!" muttered Bernaldi, his brow darkening at the obstinacy of the poor nun. "We must change our course towards her. Severity won't move her; we'll try what flattery and pretended kindness'll do."

"I'll leave that game for you to play!" said the haughty

woman; "I've no fancy for such things. It's my opinion, though, that nothing we can do will change her determination."

"She *shall* change, or, by heavens, I'll put her out of the way, and make a will to suit myself!" cried the infuriated priest.

"That's what you ought to have done long ago," coolly answered the superioress.

"I should, but for Lord De Vere's brother," said Bernaldi. "He still holds Lady Emilie's property, and would not be likely to give it up without a strict investigation."

"He does not know where she is, you say."

"No, nor never will. I have told him that she has gone to France, and he thinks she is still there. He would not dream of looking for her so near home."

"Well, but, if we should succeed in getting her to make this will, how would you manage?"

"Why, don't you see? I should tell him she came here the very day before she died, and, calling for a lawyer, caused such a will to be drawn up and sealed, without our knowledge or consent; and then handing him the will, still sealed, he could suspect nothing."

"No doubt, you would make a good story of it!" said the mother, laughing. "Come, let's have a glass of wine over it, and drink to the success of *all* our plans!"

Myrtie crept softly through the narrow, dark hall, on each side of which were ranged the cells of the hapless inmates, and, reaching at length one which had been designated as Sister Agnes', she knocked timidly, and was quickly admit-

ted by the nun into her little dormitory. Blinded by her tears the day before, Myrtie had not noticed how pale and emaciated Sister Agnes looked, and she started at the wan face and figure before her. The nun smiled sadly, as she drew the little girl closely to her side, and, throwing her arm affectionately round her, said,

"You are not afraid I am a ghost, are you?"

"O, no, ma'am!" replied Myrtie, "but I'm sorry to see you look so sick!"

A tear dropped from the nun's eye at these simple words, the first of sympathy she had heard for many a year, and she felt strangely drawn to the little creature beside her.

"What is your name, dear?" she asked.

"Myrtie, ma'am!"

"Myrtie, — that's a very pretty name! How old are you?"

"I'm twelve, and Charlie's fourteen."

"Who's Charlie, pray?" said Sister Agnes, amused at the child's earnestness and simplicity.

"Why, Charlie's my brother, ma'am!" answered Myrtie, with a little surprise that he should not be known by everybody.

"Where is he now, Myrtie?"

The eye drooped and the little bosom heaved, as she replied,

"They've put him into some such bad place as this, I suppose;" then, growing bolder, she added, "but we mean to get away when we're older."

"What do you mean by that, my child?" asked the astonished nun.

"O, I mustn't tell, cause Charlie told me not to; but

you would n't hurt us, would you?" and Myrtie looked up, with confiding innocence, into the sweet, sad face above her.

"Hurt you, my poor child!" exclaimed Sister Agnes, becoming more and more interested, — "never, *never!* Come, sit down here and tell me all your little story; for Sister Agnes will be your friend always."

Myrtie did not doubt her in the least; and she confided all she knew of herself, Charlie, Margery and Ralph, into the ear of her willing and sympathizing listener. When she had done, Sister Agnes pressed her more closely to her heart, and imprinted a warm kiss on her cheek.

"Myrtie, darling," said she, "your short life has been a sad one, but such suffering as you never dreamed of awaits you in this place. You must not stay here. But go now, dear, or you will be missed; come to me as often as you can slip away without being seen, for my heart will long for your innocent sympathy, to beguile its wretchedness."

"Sweet child!" murmured the nun, closing the door after Myrtie's retreating form, and throwing herself upon her hard pallet; — "must she too be sacrificed? No, it must not, shall not be! Though *I* may never see my childhood's home, or the dear friends of my youth, this poor lamb must be restored to its fold. How strangely has she touched a chord in my memory, bringing back long-forgotten scenes and familiar faces of the world in which I once lived! And for what have I exchanged those sweet memories? — ay, for what! Let the gloomy walls of this my prison-house hear my reply: — For an existence terrible as the tortures of a lost soul! O, my beloved father, for this have I left you to die in loneliness and grief; — for this I have sacrificed every

earthly hope! And now, as my soul is swiftly passing to its dread account, what have I to look or hope for? Nothing, nothing, but the darkness and despair of an unknown futurity!"

CHAPTER XXV.

“Tis fearful building upon any sin ;
One mischief entered, brings another in ;
The second pulls a third, the third draws more,
And they for all the rest set ope the door.”

“I TELL ye, Judy, your coffee’s thicker ’n mud, and these rolls’d weigh a pound a piece ! I can’t eat none on ’em, any way !” — and Ralph bounced out of the house, slamming the door after him, and leaving untasted the nice breakfast Judy had so carefully prepared for him.

“Goodness gracious !” exclaimed she, placing her hands on her hips, and looking with astonishment through the window at his ungainly figure as it shambled down the garden, — “what *has* come over that fellow ? Why, he’s only fit for the madhouse, and has n’t been, since those children went away. Coffee all muddy, indeed ! when I made it fresh and nice, and settled it with an egg a-purpose for him ! O, laws a massy ! well, I b’lieve men are all alike, after all !” — and, with this sage conclusion, she sat down in moody silence to partake the slighted repast.

Ralph weeded away most vigorously in his large flower-bed, often, in his abstraction, mistaking one for the other, till the

confused mass at his feet recalled his attention, and he hastily gathered up the waste in a basket, and deposited it in an unnoticed corner of the garden. While thus occupied, a sound like that of a person scratching on the other side of the wall attracted his attention, and, climbing up, he perceived a man with the cowl and cassock of an Augustine friar. At the same instant, the monk, looking up, accosted him

“Are you Ralph, the gardener?”

“I’m Ralph Riley, and nobody else!” was his reply.

“Well, come down to that little opening in the wall, yonder. I have something to say to you.”

Ralph looked a little suspicious, but he moved along to the place designated, and waited for the stranger to speak.

“You had a little boy here,” said the monk, in a whisper, “named Charlie. Do you know what has become of him?”

“He’s gone to the St. Augustine,” answered Ralph, laconically.

“Have you ever tried to see him?”

“No, ’cause it’s no use.”

“Would you like to see and talk with him?”

“Would n’t I!” cried Ralph, looking up, joyfully.

“Well, the poor fellow is nearly heart-broken; and I took pity on him, and promised to find you out, and bring him tidings of his little sister, Myrtie.”

“Then, he’s told ye about her,” — and Ralph’s countenance fell; — “but, he’ll never see her agin.”

“How? Why so?”

“O, she’s gone to be a nun; but they’ll kill her afore she’s old enough for that!”

"When did she go?" asked the monk, without noticing the last part of Ralph's answer.

"About a month ago — the day after Charlie went away."

A shade of disappointment crossed Father Ambrose's face (for it was he); and, after a moment's thoughtfulness, he said,

"Poor Charlie! it will almost kill him to hear of this; but, if you will come to this place just after sundown to-night, I will manage some way to get him here, so that you can tell him all about it. He will bear it better from you."

"I'll be here, and thank ye too," Ralph quickly rejoined, and they parted.

"Wal," thought he, "I'm mighty glad he's got a friend; but my poor birdie's all alone 'mong them great ugly nuns. I must go 'n tell Margery 'bout this."

Pity, indignation and grief, alternately prevailed in the gardener's heart, as he poured out its wretchedness to his willing listener.

"Now, Ralph," said Marguerite, as he concluded, "you must know the great purpose for which I pray that my life may be spared. These children, Ralph, — that noble boy, and Myrtie, lovely as an angel, — *must be rescued* from the terrible fate to which they are consigned. You do not know the reason of their treatment; but listen, and I will tell you. Their father, Sir Charles Duncan, left an immense property, which, at the death of their grandmother, will fall to these two alone. Now, the bishop — yes, Ralph, the *bishop and priest* together — have planned to keep these children within their grasp, that they may secure the property to themselves, and — the church. Shame upon me! I was a third party in this wrong; but my eyes are opened, and my heart too, I trust, and now I only

live to make reparation. You, Ralph, better than anybody else, can aid me in this; and, after the little you have seen of what their life must be as they are, I know you will do everything in your power."

"That I will," said Ralph, to whom this version of the case was new; "but what'll we do?"

"We must send those children back to their excellent mother," slowly and emphatically replied Marguerite.

Ralph scratched his head, in the greatest bewilderment. "How are ye 'gon to do it?" he asked.

"I do not know myself yet; but I feel persuaded there will some way open for them. I may die first, but you, Ralph, must never rest till it is accomplished. Will you promise me this?"

"Yes, I promise;" and Ralph crossed himself, with solemnity.

"All you can do now," continued Marguerite, "is to cheer them up, and encourage them to hope for the future.

"I'll tell Charlie, to-night, that as sartin as you and I live he'll be got away from that hole," said Ralph, warming up. "And I could n't help sayin' some such thing to my poor birdie when she looked so drefful at me."

"You did right, Ralph; we will save them yet."

"I don't see how it's 'gon to be done; but I'll tell 'em so, any how." And Ralph left the cottage more puzzled, but with a lighter heart, than he entered it.

It was dusk when he repaired to the rendezvous the monk had proposed, so that he could not see Charlie's pale face, or its woe-begone expression; but the tremulous voice with which the little fellow begged to see his sister completely overcame

Ralph, and the big tears chased each other down his cheek as he told the boy of Myrtie and her trials. Father Ambrose stood by, but something seemed to affect his eyes, and he turned away to wipe them.

"Charlie!" whispered Ralph, "guess what Margery and I've been talkin' about, this afternoon; we're 'gon to git you away from here, and send you home to your mother."

"How can you, Ralph?" asked Charlie.

"That's jest what I asked myself, but we're 'gon to, some how."

"O, Ralph, how kind you are to say that! Ever since I came here I've prayed to see my mother; and one night I thought I saw her among the angels; but I'm afraid I shall die before I can go to her."

"No fear o' that, Charlie, if ye only keep up good heart. Ye can stan' it a spell longer in that 'tarnal old hole, can't ye?"

"O, yes, Ralph; I could bear anything if I knew I should go with Myrtie and live at our own home again."

"Wal, jest consider that's settled, and cheer up, my boy."

"I will, Ralph; but can't I see Myrtie again till then?"

"I don't see no way; they keep her mighty close; 't was as much as *I* could do to get one sight o' her sweet face."

Charlie's breast heaved, and tears fell thick and fast at this disappointment; but the severe discipline of the last few weeks had taught him to control his feelings, which he quickly did, and, with a trembling voice, sent a message of love to the dear sister he had so longed to see.

Father Ambrose had not been an unmoved spectator of this scene. For years his heart had not been so touched as now,

and he could with difficulty restrain himself from falling on the boy's neck, to weep with him in his misery. From that moment the orphans cause became his own, and with heart and soul he entered into all their plans, proving himself a friend indeed to the friendless, and cheering Charlie on through trials and sufferings, by ever pointing to a golden future as the requital for all these woes.

Ralph's perplexity increased each day, as a thousand new schemes were planned and rejected by him and Marguerite, while still the burden seemed resting on them.

"We must try to be patient," Marguerite would say to him; "such a daring feat as ours requires time, as well as the most careful management. I do not doubt we shall accomplish it; but it may be months, and even years, hence."

"O, dear, dear, and my birdie feelin' so dreffully! I tell ye, she can't stan' it, no way." And Ralph would run off to conceal his agitation.

One day he came to Marguerite, with a very serious air, and asked her to bring him a cup of tea, at the same time taking from his pocket a small paper.

"Why, Ralph," said she, "what is the matter now? what are you going to do?"

"You'll see, Margery, if you bring me the tea." And, willing to indulge him in his strange conceit, she made the tea and brought it to him. Very deliberately unfolding the little paper, he poured its contents into the cup.

"There!" said he, "now I've done what I promised to; but I would n't advise ye to drink it, that's all."

More astonished than ever, Marguerite exclaimed, "Why, Ralph! what does all this mean?"

"Don't ye know," said he, coming close to her, and speaking very low, "his ruv'rence told me I might go to see Myrtie if I'd do somethin' for him 'thout tellin' on 't?"

"Yes, Ralph, — but go on!"

"Wal, this mornin', jest as I was comin' over here, he cum down the garden mighty pleasant-like, and says he, 'Have you seen Marguerite lately?' I told him no, but I's jest goin' over there. 'Was ye?' says he; 'then I want to say somethin' to ye first;' and, upon that, he took this paper out o' his pocket, and says he, 'You know, Ralph, you promised to do *anything* I bid ye, if I let ye see Myrtie often.'

"'Often!' said I; 'but I *have n't* seen her but once, and then I had to come to yur ruv'rence afore they'd let me in.'

"'O, well,' said he, 'you may be sure that won't happen agin; they did n't understand it over there; you may go to-morrow, if ye wish.' I jumped right up, I tell ye, when he said that. 'But,' ses he, 'you must first do as I tell ye.' 'That I will,' ses I; and then he gave me this paper, and told me it was somethin' to make ye stronger, and that I must jest put it into yur tea, 'thout yur knowin it. 'Yes, *sir*, yur ruv'rence,' ses I, 'I'll do it.' I did n't let on that I 'spected anything; but I thought 't would be jest as well if ye knowed what he said."

"Ralph, you are a noble fellow; you have saved my life. I have known for a long time that he wished me out of the way; but I'm too wary for him. Well he knew that none other could have done this deed; but *you* I should not have watched, and, therefore, he chose his instrument well."

"What'll I say to him, though, when he asks me 'bout it?"

"Tell him you did as he bid you, and leave the rest to me,

Poor, pitiful fool! my vengeance is not yet completed, as he shall find, to his sorrow."

"I could n't have you die, no how, I tell ye," said Ralph, his eyes glistening.

"I don't expect to live long, Ralph; something within tells me my days are numbered; but not by *his* hand must I die, though he thus wills it. Profess strict obedience to him, Ralph, but fail not to confide to me *all* he says; for *thus only can those children be saved!*"

"I'll do it—never fear but what I will!" Ralph exclaimed, earnestly.

"Are you going to see Myrtie to-morrow?"

"Indeed I am; I must cheer up my poor birdie, or she'll die."

"Tell her Margery loves her, prays for her, and will try to save her."

"I'll tell her we're goin' to save her. I tell ye it makes me feel right wicked to have her shut up so from all the buds and flowers, and nice frolics, she used to like so well."

"It won't be long, Ralph; she'll soon be as free as the birds."

"That's a fact, and Ralph Riley's old feet'll follow her to the world's end. I must go home now, or his ruv'ence'll be missin' me; look out all round, Margery, won't ye?"

"You may be sure I shall, more now than ever, after what you have told me, Ralph."

Much to his surprise and gratification, Ralph was admitted without a question to the spacious hall of the convent, and Myrtie came bounding with joy to meet him. For a few moments he neither knew nor cared for aught save that his

birdie was in his arms once more. Then, as he held her from him to see if she had changed, he became conscious that a pair of gray eyes were fixed steadily upon them, watching every word and movement. This so disconcerted him that he could only clasp Myrtie more closely to his heart, in silence. At length a loud knocking at the outer door, and the entrance of visitors, diverted the attention of the superioress, and Ralph improved the opportunity thus afforded him to whisper words of comfort and hope into his birdie's heart. That little heart beat quick at the mention of Charlie's name, and his simple, affectionate message was treasured midst her tears. Then her little confidences were all poured into the ear ever open to her slightest word, and Ralph was made acquainted with all dear Sister Agnes had said and done, and how she had promised to try and help her to get away from the convent, before she was old enough to take the veil.

What a relief it was to her faithful, true-hearted friend, when Myrtie assured him that she had not been treated so badly since he was there before! To be sure, nobody but Sister Agnes had spoken a pleasant word to her; but then they didn't whip her, and make her lie all night on a hard stone floor, as they used to, and so she got along pretty well, and he must not cry any more about her, for she could bear it till ———

She did not finish this sentence, for the sharp gray eyes were again upon them; and the mother said, in no very pleasant tone,

"Your whispered conference has been too long, already; you will go directly to your tasks, Myrtie, and your old friend will be careful not to repeat his *long* visit again."

What cared Ralph for her sour words and looks? He had held his birdie to his heart, and found her better than his fears anticipated; and was he not soon to see her free among the hills of her own native home? Lighter-hearted than he had been since Myrtie left the cottage, Ralph returned to his labor and his schemes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ And doth not a meeting like this make amends
For all the long years I’ve been wandering away ? ”

TEN years ! And how lightly has their swift passage touched the cheek and brow of Herbert Lindsey’s lovely wife ! Care and trouble have been strange guests in their peaceful manse ; and, but for the deep sympathy which made the sorrows of another her own, Bessie’s days would have been passed in almost cloudless sunshine. The little olive-plants that gather around her table give her a matronly air, by no means unbecoming ; and if the man of God, in rebuking sin among his people, often feels that pride and idolatry are to be especially guarded against in his own heart, as he gazes at his home treasures, who can wonder ? Herbert Lindsey feels, and rightly, too, that to the humble, fervent piety and holy example of his wife may be traced, in a great measure, his own eminent success. Beloved he certainly is for his many excellences and devotion to his spiritual calling ; but the words of wisdom which fall from his lips seem to have a deeper significance in the pure and heavenly life shining forth from the pastor’s home.

And Anna, too, whom we left long years since at the bridal altar, mingling with its sacred vows a mother’s unceasing

prayers for her lost ones, — how has *her* heart been sustained in its still hopeless bereavement? Alas! the grave must long since have given its silent response, but for the noble, unwearying devotion of him who uttered no unmeaning vow when he received to his heart the broken flower, and promised to cherish and protect it from every rude blast. Well and faithfully has he kept that pledge; and, though each year the fragile form of his beautiful bride bends more droopingly upon his bosom, as the mother's hopes, one by one, fade away, yet the warm, loving glance which ever meets his own tells him that in her spirit's shrine he is forever embalmed. Dear to him is the task of winning back the beloved life he has ever worshipped; and happiness deep and unutterable, though often sad and subdued, reigns in the home of Robert Graham. Their little coterie of friends remains unbroken; for death, at that fell tragedy, stood back aghast, daring only to point its skeleton finger to the circle vanquished by a more terrible foe.

Seventy winters tell their snowy tale in the venerable locks of the village squire, while Mrs. Clayton still faithfully retains her post by his side, cheering him through life's last days, untouched herself by time's quick flight.

Near the old stone mansion Robert reared a beautiful home for his bride; and now another, no less costly or elegant, is placed by its side, and Nelly Lee, proud and happy, is its presiding genius. Like a butterfly she flits through each happy home, carrying light and joy to all; then, closing her wings in *her own* bower, she sinks with a grateful, overflowing heart, and pours forth her simple orisons for him who has

thus sheltered her from the cold storms of this pitiless world in his paternal arms.

Nelly must needs be grateful ; for the true-hearted Quaker has nobly redeemed his promise to the friendless child of charity, and no father could more tenderly watch over *his own* than does James Lee cherish his adopted daughter. Only one cause had Nelly for unhappiness ; that was in the obscurity of her birth. Could she be assured that *honest* though abject poverty had been the lot of her parents, then would her mind be at rest ; but the blood tingled painfully through her veins as the humiliating thought often forced itself upon her that she *might* be the child of shame. She would not disturb the peace of her dear father — for so had she learned to call Mr. Lee — by such vague fancies ; but still they preyed silently upon her young heart.

Of his early history Mr. Lee seldom spoke, save to Robert and his wife ; and they only gathered that some great sorrow had burdened his youth, the secret of which would go with him to his grave. But not thus was the calm, *submissive* spirit in which he had received these sore chastisements to be rewarded — not such the requital of his kindness to the orphan !

“A letter for you, father,” said Nelly, as he came home, one evening, “and a singular-looking missive it is, too ;” and she handed him a package bearing a foreign stamp and seal. He took it, gazed earnestly at the superscription, and then, as his eye fell on the stamp, he trembled violently, and retired to his own room before breaking the seal. One, two, and even three hours passed, and still he returned not, till Nelly,

unable longer to endure the suspense, ventured to knock timidly at his door.

"Come in, dear child," he cried; and, holding out his hand as she approached him, he said, in an agitated voice, "Come hither, my daughter; here is a mystery to be unravelled."

"Does it nearly concern you, father, and is it anything very serious?" she inquired, anxiously.

"More serious, and more nearly concerning me, than thee can imagine, Nelly! But first I must tell thee that which I had thought to bury with me—a tale of wretchedness that made this world a wilderness, till thou, dear child, stirred again the fountain of love in my heart!" He paused, and Nelly drew nearer to him, clasping his hand with filial affection, while she exclaimed,

"What does not the poor orphan owe to this hand, that raised her from degradation, and suffered her to win a place in the noblest heart that ever throbbed!"

"Nay, nay, my child! thou knowest not how thou hast brought back to life thy poor father. When all his sad tale is told thee, then, perhaps, thou wilt see the glorious mission it has been given thee to fulfil."

"Bless you, my dear father, for these words! and now I listen with intense interest to your story, and the connection it has with that letter."

Mr. Lee shaded his face, that its varying emotions might not be visible to her, and then proceeded:

"In my early youth, Nelly, I wooed and won a beautiful bride. Carrie Linton, an only daughter, beloved by all, and sought by many richer and more noble than I, gave to me the priceless treasure of her love; and I could only worship and

idolize the being who had thus ennobled me. In my eyes she was all perfection ; but friends, who looked with calmer gaze at this paragon, cautioned me against her light and trifling character. Blinded as I was, it seemed to me but the exuberance of a happy, loving heart, all too soon to be checked by the serious, earnest life which she well knew awaited her as my wife. She loved me passionately (O, I will *never* doubt that!), and we both trusted to the serenity of the future for our happiness. *Her* friends, too, saw the incongruity of the gay, fashionable belle becoming a sober Quaker's wife. But when did *love* ever stop to consider or reason?

“Carrie and I were married in the full expectation of a *quiet*, blissful union ; and for weeks and months naught disturbed our deep, tranquil happiness, while she was pronounced by all a model Quaker's wife. The advent of a little being, who usurped her mother's name, and inherited her beauty, seemed to perfect our joy. Thus were the skies bright above us, and, as we thought, our path strewn with flowers. When little Carrie was three months old, I was called to England to attend to some important business, and left, with many tears, my home Eden. Little thought I that a *serpent* was lurking around that sacred bower.

“My wife, engrossed with the care of her little nursling and other home duties, seldom wrote ; but the charming simplicity of her affectionate messages repaid me for their scarcity. The business which called me away proved much more intricate than I had anticipated, and consequently detained me abroad beyond all my expectations. I had not heard from home for many months, when one morning a package was handed me, bearing the familiar stamp, but in a strange hand-

writing. I tore it open with a vague presentiment of coming evil. But who can picture my despair when, devouring its contents, I learned that my wife, at the instigation of base calumniators and the entreaties of her friends, had left forever her husband and home, and that legal proceedings were already commenced for our separation! Again and again did those terrible words burn themselves into my brain, ere I realized their dread import. Then, when the overwhelming truth forced itself upon me, delirium mercifully blotted out those first hours of anguish, and I awoke to consciousness under the gentle ministrations of my kind hostess, and excellent physician, who, the better to understand my case, deemed it necessary to read the dreadful letter. Unutterable sympathy dwelt in every line of their faces, as they bent over me in unwearied efforts to restore the shattered senses.

“Despite all their remonstrances, I determined to return at once to my home (alas! no more a home for me), and prevent, if possible, the terrible consummation. But I arrived too late! Slander had scattered its foul venom before me; and I, who had been toiling day and night that I might the sooner return to my loved ones, was stigmatized as a base deserter of my wife and child for the low-born pleasures of a voluptuary! The fiat had gone forth — my doom was sealed, and my home stripped of its idols! Agonizingly I besought one interview with her who *was* my wife; but, to prevent this, they had removed her far away, and I never saw her again. It was in vain to refute the charges; it could not give me back my treasures, and what cared I for aught else? Since that time I have wandered over the earth, finding neither rest nor happiness, till *thou*, dear Nelly, came like a God-send to

my heart, and opened again its sweet fountains. To me hast thou been as my own child !”

“ O, my father !” cried Nelly, raising her streaming eyes to his, “ what sorrows have been yours !—and yet you endure all in uncomplaining silence !”

“ *There* is my strength, my daughter !” said he, pointing above, “ and there, only, can the secrets of my heart be disclosed. But when I meet *her* pure spirit above, then, *then* will she *know* the truth and faithfulness of her husband !”

“ But what has *this* to do with it, father ?” asked Nelly, pointing to the letter.

“ Much, every way, my dear ; for it gives me the startling information that my child still exists in some place unknown to her maternal relatives. It seems—though I knew it not before—that Carrie left them all, and sought some obscure place, where she lived in sorrow, and died with grief. Her dear remains still rest they know not where, and my own child is, like me, a wanderer on the earth. A large fortune (so this letter tells me) awaits her when found. But not for that will I now seek her. Heaven grant me the precious boon of clasping once more to my heart this dear image of my lost Carrie !”

“ Amen !” responded Nelly, from her heart.

Mr. Lee gazed lovingly at the unselfish, noble girl, as he added, “ To-morrow I must leave thee ; and, should my prayers be answered, *thou* wilt lose no place in thy father’s heart.”

“ Think not of me, dear father !” she replied ; “ my heart will pray unceasingly for your success, and the happiest moment of my life will be when I see your Carrie locked in

her father's arms!" Had the gift of prophecy been conferred on Nelly, she could not have spoken more truthfully.

The next morning, pale and agitated, James Lee went forth on his errand of love. Weeks passed ere the faintest trace of his lost treasures could be found; yet he wearied not in his ceaseless search. At length an incident, trifling in itself, led him to the obscure but charming village of W——, where he learned from an old lady that, many years before, a lady and child inhabited the small cottage near her, just in the edge of the wood. She "could tell but little about them," she said, "for, if her memory served her right, no one knew or visited them." Where they went, or what became of them, she did not know, for she "went away about that time to live with her daughter."

Vague and unsatisfactory as was this information, it yet determined Mr. Lee to remain and trace the history of this lady. He soon chanced to meet a nurse, who had been employed in that capacity for thirty years, and professed to know everything about everybody. From her he drew all that was necessary to convince him that here, indeed, his lost Carrie lived and died. Where she was laid not even the old nurse could tell; and his widowed heart wandered among the graves, if perchance *her* spirit might lead him to its resting-place.

But his daughter—where was she? All that he could learn was, that some person had taken her away; but *where* none knew, or what was to be her fate. Sadly the father pursued his anxious search,—hope and fear alternately prevailing in his breast,—till finally his perseverance was rewarded by hearing that the little orphan child (as she was

supposed to be) had been carried to a remote town. Thither he went at once, only to learn that from thence she had been removed to another town, more distant, and so on. Following the wanderings of the friendless girl, he had well-nigh yielded to his anxiety and grief for the fate of his only, darling child. With what surprise and consternation did he at length trace her to the pauper's home in the village of B——, the very place he had so often visited with Bessie, and from whose church-yard he had taken Nelly to his home!

A thousand wild, delirious fancies filled his brain, as he thought of Nelly's story of her own childhood and unknown parentage. Heart-sick with suspense, and unable to control his agitation, the bewildered father entered the asylum of poverty, and hurriedly inquired if any of its inmates bore the name of Carrie Lee.

"Not any," was the laconic answer.

"But such an one did come here, in the year 18—?"

"Very likely," answered the overseer, "but I was not here at that time."

"Hast thou no records?"

"Yes, sir, but the town-clerk keeps them."

"For Heaven's sake, friend," exclaimed Mr. Lee, slipping some money into his hand, "go bring me those records!"

The man obeyed with alacrity this *golden* order, and soon returned with the important documents. With trembling hands Mr. Lee turned over page after page, till, in the very year he had named, he found an entry of the reception, not of Carrie, but of Nelly Lee. The most careful scrutiny proved that no other of that name had been entered there. Scarcely daring to trust his thoughts, the half-crazed father

found the widow of the former overseer, who was in nowise loth to give him a bit of the gossip of her palmy days. Distracted between uncertainty and hope, his incoherent questions were slightly heeded by the woman, who evidently thought him a little "out of his head." The rare opportunity, however, of displaying her knowledge, could not be resisted, and she rattled on most unmercifully about all the children "she had been a mother to." Mr. Lee listened with the utmost impatience, hoping she would at length reach the longed-for name; nor was he disappointed. "Then," said she, "there was the poorest little creetur you ever did see cum one day, with a man, who sed they'd kep her long enough in his town, and we must take our spell. She'd been round every town jist so, — nobody knowed where she cum from, or who she'd ever belonged to. I tuk a mighty likin' to her, she's so terrible putty; so I kep her longer'n I need to, and then an old maid, here, Miss Nancy, took her right hum with her, and made a darter on her. She was mighty curus 'bout her name, tho'. Sumtimes she'd say 't was Carrie, and then she'd cry to be called Nelly; so my old man put it on to his books — Lord a'marcy, the man's gone clean crazy!" — exclaimed she, as with her last words Mr. Lee rushed out of the house and down the street as far as she could see, — "I guess I'll bar my door, cause I'm a lone widder, and like as not he'll be back agin." So saying, she secured her house, and sat down to consider the event, while the object of her fears was riding in hot haste towards his home, his heart bounding with wild ecstasy.

"Come, Anna," said Mrs. Lindsey, one pleasant morning, "I have called for you to walk with me over to Nelly's."

"I have been thinking of the same thing this morning, Bessie, and will be ready to join you in a few moments."

"Don't you think Nelly is very much changed since Mr. Lee went away?" asked Anna, as they pursued their walk.

"Poor girl, she seems lonely and low-spirited, I think!" said Bessie. "She is so fond of him, she cannot bear to have him out of her sight."

"I know she is," said Anna, "but it seems to me that is not *all* that troubles her. Have you noticed how pale and careworn she looks, of late, as though some secret sorrow preyed upon her?"

"You are a closer observer than I, Anna; I confess I have not thought much of it. But there she is, coming out to meet us; she must answer for herself."

"Nelly, dear," said Anna, when they were quietly seated, "we have been thinking that you look quite sad, lately."

"Do I?" answered Nelly, smiling. "I am very far from feeling sad just at this moment, I am so glad to see you both!"

"When do you expect Mr. Lee?"

"I cannot tell you," said Nelly; "his return is very uncertain. I look for him every day, and yet he may not come for weeks — perhaps months."

"I miss him very much," said Bessie; "our circle never seems complete without him."

"And Robert," added Anna, "can scarcely get along without his right-hand man, as he calls Mr. Lee."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when all three started, as a carriage drove furiously up to the door.

"There he is!" cried Nelly, violently agitated, and at the

same moment James Lee burst into the room, and caught her to his heart. "My daughter! my *own* child!" he cried; "thank God, I have found thee at last!" Then, as Nelly looked wonderingly in his face, he added, "Dear, *precious* image of my lost Carrie, why have I not before seen thy mother's wondrous beauty in thy sweet face? Nelly, thou art indeed *mine*! 'Tis thy *father's* arms that embrace thee — thine *own* father! Thou art no more Nelly, but the sweet namesake of her that bore thee, my sainted Carrie!"

Joy like this who can picture? — when the dark waves that have so long rolled and dashed at will against his struggling heart *are stayed*, and a gentle voice comes o'er the waters, crying "Peace, peace!" And thou too, noble girl, hast now gained the only desire of thy heart — an *honorable parentage*.

Sincere and heart-felt were the tears of joy that mingled with his own, as Mr. Lee told his tale to the two friends who had witnessed the strange scene. If in Anna's heart some murmuring thoughts would whisper what might have been her joy, that heart replied, at once, "My Father rules the storm," and hushed were its murmurings.

"Who can now distrust the beneficence of our God?" exclaimed Mr. Lee, in the fulness of his heart. "Friend Anna, *thou'lt* yet see joy as great as mine — the spirit within tells me thus."

Mournfully shaking her head, Anna joined her friend in silence, and in deep thought both pursued their homeward way.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“O ! think what anxious moments pass between
The birth of plots and their last fatal periods !
O ! ’t is a dreadful interval of time,
Filled up with horror and big with death ! ”

ADDISON.

THE bishop paced, with impatient steps, the soft-carpeted floor of his private audience chamber. Something unusual had evidently occurred to disturb him ; for as often as he passed and repassed the window, he would look anxiously into the courtyard below, as though watching for the arrival of some one.

“What a vexatious piece of business this is !” at length he exclaimed. “I’m really afraid those blood-hounds will track him here before Bernaldi gets him safely off. How provoking that, just because he served us once (and he was well paid for it, too), he must needs call upon us to save his neck from the gallows ! If I was sure he would keep mum till he did swing, de’il a bit I’d do for him, I know. But it’s just the way with these fellows !—let them once get any hold on you, and there’s no end to their demands.”

“Come in !” cried he, in answer to a gentle knock at the door, and the object of his soliloquy presented himself.

“Ah, Manning, how are you, this morning ?” said he,

extending his hand. "Are you rested from your wild-goose chase! Ha! ha! ha! but that was a good one, though."

"I must own that I feel considerably used up," replied the other, with a yawn. "To tell the truth, I did n't dare to sleep with but one eye at a time; therefore, you will excuse me, most excellent father, if I stretch myself a while on this dainty lounge."

"Certainly! Make yourself at home, Mr. Manning; you need all the rest you can get, as you have quite a little journey before you yet."

"The deuce I have! But how am I to get there without being seen?"

"Father Adolpho, with his shaven beard and pate, accompanying his holy brother on missions of mercy, need not fear to meet the officers of justice face to face. Little will they suspect *him* to be their prison-bird;" and the bishop laughed heartily at his own craftiness.

"By Jove, I could n't have fixed that up better myself!" cried Philip Manning, springing to his feet as he caught an inkling of their ingenious plan; "but I'm deuced afraid they 'll be at my heels before we are ready for them."

"Here comes Bernaldi, at last!" burst from the bishop's lips, with a sigh of relief; "now we are safe."

Philip Manning could scarcely believe in his own identity as he surveyed himself in the glass from head to foot, after leaving Bernaldi's dexterous hands; and loud and long did he laugh at the metamorphosed being before him. "You say that fellow's name" — pointing to himself — "is Father Adolpho. Well, it 'll seem pretty curious; but I guess I can manage it. It's better, any how, than to have one's neck tied up

too tight! Where are we bound to, though? I have n't asked that question yet."

"Father Bernaldi will accompany you to a brotherhood in a retired spot, where we hope you will be cautious as to your future conduct. Your entrance there will bring you under solemn obligations to obey, perfectly and implicitly, every command of the church, through its chosen head; and any violation of such a pledge would be visited by its severest penalties."

"Most holy father, I thank thee for thy leniency and kindness to the poor convict!" exclaimed Manning, with solemn mockery, falling on his knees before the bishop.

"We know how to treat our *friends*," replied the bishop, significantly; "but rise up now, and hasten away, lest some untoward event should yet place you in the hands of the law. Henceforth, let 'Father Adolpho' forget that such a being as Philip Manning existed. Farewell!"

"I would speak with you a moment," said Bernaldi, returning to the bishop's presence, while the pseudo-monk awaited him in the hall. "This troublesome affair may detain me some time from home — perhaps a month."

"Well, well," interrupted the bishop; "if you succeed in ridding us of him, it will be a good month's work."

"No doubt of that," replied the other; "but what I wish to say is, that Marguerite seems failing rapidly; and, should she require the service of a priest before I return —"

"I'll attend to that, I assure you! Her last confession might be rather dangerous for us."

"Just so," said Bernaldi; "and now I go, with your blessing."

"Thank God, they 're off, at last!" cried the bishop, as he watched the speedy departure and retreating forms of the *brother monks*. "Now I will go and attend to this thing immediately."

A visit from the bishop was, of late, something so unusual, that it caused Marguerite's cheek to flush as he approached her bedside.

"Benedicite!" solemnly pronounced he, laying his hand upon her head: "how is it with thee, my daughter?"

"Death is not far off," replied she, feebly; "I feel his approach."

"And where, my daughter, does your heart rest in this hour?"

"Upon the mother of my Jesus."

"Nobly answered," said he; "there let it rest, till by the intercession of the saints and the prayers of the holy church she receives you to her bosom, fit companion for saints and angels."

"But my heart is vile, most holy father."

"Then will it be as the heart of Mary. Let no doubts disturb your peace; for will not the *church* take care of its own? and you, who have so faithfully served it, shall be borne in its sheltering arms to the very gates of bliss!"

"Your words, most holy father, inspire me with hope that even such as *I* may be saved."

"Most assuredly, my daughter; can you doubt it? But, first, every thought and desire of your heart must be freely confessed, that it may be cleansed from all its impurity and

guilt. Whenever you desire and are fully prepared for this important act, I will come and receive your words."

"I thank thee, holy father. I will lose no time in sending to thee, when my soul is ready."

"Till then, farewell, my daughter. God be with thee!"

Her own soul — or those dear children! Which shall be saved? To the *true* Catholic there is no medium ground. The heart must be laid bare to its inquisitorial dissector, or the soul will be accursed forever. Marguerite believed this, for she knew no other way. What wonder, then, that long, torturing, agonizing struggles rent her feeble frame, ere she could save, *at such a price*, objects precious even as they! But out of that furnace she came forth purified as by fire. The secret of her heart shall go with her to her grave, — thus did she resolve. And who shall say that the recording angel, as he registered that solemn expiation, blotted not out with the penitent's tears her dark page of guilt!

For many days after the bishop's visit the poor invalid seemed rapidly declining; yet she earnestly cautioned Ralph to breathe not a word of it to his master; "For," said she, "the last great work of my life is yet unfinished, and till it be accomplished death itself will, I know, stay its hand."

Ralph was in sad perplexity. That Marguerite should die without a priest he could not endure to think of; but he feared to disobey her wishes, lest it should somehow jeopardize the interests of his "birdie." Marguerite deemed it safer to keep him in ignorance of the details of her plan for rescuing the children; but he well understood that the little missives he so faithfully, though stealthily, conveyed back and forth, had

some reference to that object, else he would not have so toiled whole nights to reach a distant town and return again before his absence could be known. Then, too, it was his hand that furnished her all needed materials for writing, though much wondering why she, day after day, kept up such a continual scratching with her pen. Yet he blindly obeyed all her directions, never doubting her assurance that in so doing he was but serving his "birdie." At length, after one of his nocturnal rambles, Ralph brought her, one morning, a letter whose perusal, though it agitated, seemed to take a load from her spirit. The hectic deepened on her cheek, the eye burned with new lustre, as she pressed it to her bosom, exclaiming, "*Now am I ready!* Willingly, O blessed Mother of Jesus, do I yield up my soul for this great boon!" Hush! sees she not that cold shadow stealing silently over her threshold? Nearer and nearer it approaches, till she feels its icy breath, and in terror cries, "O Death, spare yet a little longer thy victim! In mercy stay thy cold hand till another sun shall set, that my vow may be accomplished!" At that piercing cry, the shadow paused, turned aside, and, with uplifted arm, awaited the implored reprieve.

"Run quickly!" said the dying woman to Ralph, who stood near; "bring Charlie to my bedside, for my moments are numbered, and I have much to say to him."

Ralph obeyed; and, through the kind management of Father Ambrose, quickly returned with the trembling lad. Two years since, in that very room, Charlie had parted from Marguerite; and now, for the first time, they met, — met in the presence of death. With sobs which he could not repress,

Charlie kneeled by her bedside, and covered with kisses the white, emaciated hand.

"My poor boy," said she, motioning him to rise, "we have no time to lose; a few hours hence and these lips will be closed; but, O, what a tale must they unfold to your innocent heart, ere death seals them forever! But, first, Charlie, promise that you will forgive me, — forgive, even though I have blighted your young life, — forgive me for the sake of the reparation I now seek to make!"

"O, Margery! *dear* Margery, don't talk so!" cried Charlie, with a choking voice. "You and Ralph are all the friends Myrtie and I have had, and when you are gone what shall we do?"

"Say that you will forgive me, Charlie!"

"If there is anything but kindness to forgive, I do from my heart!" replied he.

"Now, Ralph," continued she, "good and kind that you are, will you leave us a while? What I have to say must be heard by Charlie alone."

"Come nearer, dear child! your sad, care-worn face tells me what you are suffering. I *know*, Charlie, — and, O, I know too well! — what our darling Myrtie must suffer if she remains within those dreadful walls! Do you remember your mother, Charlie?"

"I don't remember how she looked," he answered; "but I have dreamed of her so much lately, I think I should know her. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I wish you to be like her. Listen now, Charlie, and I will tell you what I remember of her. When I first saw her, she was sitting with her babe in her arms, and you,

her first-born, was by her side. She looked like an angel; and I trembled in her presence, as I thought of the wicked errand upon which I had come. But I was hardened then; and, besides, the wicked man whom I served was always near to urge me on to the dreadful deed. It was *I*, Charlie, who helped to steal you from your beautiful home and angel mother, and brought you over the cold waters, to spend your life in solitude and misery, — and your baby sister too. Think how it must have broken your mother's heart to have her treasures thus torn from her! Long and faithfully have you been sought for in every corner of the earth; but no eye can ever penetrate these hidden places, and she knows not what has been the fate of her darlings. My breath fails me; I wanted to tell you how your young, innocent lives have brought me to repentance; but, lest I should not have strength, I have written it all in this" (handing him a package); "and now, before it is too late, let me tell you that Marguerite, guilty and faithless as she has been, has done what she could to repair the great wrong. Yes, Charlie, I have given up my soul to restore you to your mother — Water! quick! quick! I faint!" said the sufferer, falling back on her pillow.

Pale and affrighted, Charlie sprang to her assistance, entreating, passionately, that she would not leave him thus; that, ere death claimed her, she would, in pity, return and save her lost children.

Those accents of entreaty reached her heart; and, though death's relentless fingers were grasping their prey, she murmured, incoherently, through her thickening breath, "This letter — take it — go to him — he will save you — God will bless you — I know it — don't tell Ralph — tell Myrtie — I

died for you — that package — for your mother — what do I see — Jesus will have mercy on me — O, glorious! glorious!"

Charlie was alone with the dead! Affectionately but reverently closing those eyes which had ever beamed kindly on him, he bent over the still form, and paid his tearful tribute to her memory. Then, stilling his grief, in that silent presence he opened Marguerite's legacy — *his passport home!* The letter which she had given him with her dying breath caused his heart to leap wildly, as hope, strong and earnest, sprang up within him. Thus it ran:

"MY DEAR SISTER: You, whom we have for twenty years mourned as dead, can scarcely imagine the surprise your letter caused me. It came as from the grave, for you neither tell me where you are, nor whether I shall ever see you again. O, why will you keep yourself thus estranged? Our hearts and arms are open to receive you. I shall never forgive those priests for enticing you into a convent; and, could I find you now, I would snatch you from their grasp. To show you that I still love you, my sister, and not without the hope that it may win you back to me, I will undertake your mission, though, let me tell you, it is a dangerous one, requiring both ingenuity and despatch. My vessel will be ready to sail next Monday; but, as it may require a longer time for your protégés to effect their escape, I will wait for them, holding myself in readiness to slip the cable at very short notice. Enclosed you will find minute directions how and where to find me. If the boy will follow these, he will meet with no difficulty; but the girl I should think would need some one to help her along. You do not tell me who they are, or where bound, except to New York; and, perhaps, it is best I should not know; but be assured they shall receive every attention from me, on my sister's account.

"What more can I say to induce you to return to us? Your uncouth but trusty messenger will absolutely give me

no tidings of you ; and I can only trust that, on my return, your gratitude, if not affection, will bring you to me. Then only peace and happiness will be restored to your brother's heart."

Again and again did Charlie read this precious letter, and the accompanying note of directions, till every word was indelibly stamped in his memory. Then, opening the larger package Marguerite had designated for his mother, he found it contained his own and Myrtie's story, from the moment they were torn from her till now. Enclosed with the rest was a beautifully embroidered purse, containing all the earthly possessions of her who had, year by year, hoarded them for this very purpose. Charlie wept at this last token of repentance, and, carefully enclosing it, together with the invaluable papers, in a small parcel, he wrote to Myrtie to guard them sacredly, and, by the memory of their blessed mother; to effect, in some way, her escape to the place designated in the note ; that the next Monday he would meet her there, if alive, did she but say she would go. Then, turning towards the face of the dead, to read her silent approval from those pallid lips, he breathed one long, last adieu, and left forever the cottage which had been his prison-house.

"How is she now?" asked Ralph, who had been watching for him near the garden.

"She has gone to her rest, Ralph. Bury her there in the little spot where Myrtie and I used to play together, and keep the flowers blooming on her grave, Ralph ; for nobly has she died."

The big tears dropped from Ralph's eyes as he answered,

"I will, Charlie; but what'll now become of you and my birdie?"

"Good, kind Ralph, what a friend have you been to us! You shall never be forgotten. Here is a package, Ralph, as precious as your birdie's life; will you carry it to her, and be sure that no one sees it?"

"That I will," said Ralph, "this very night."

"And be sure you bring me an answer, Ralph. I will be at that little place in the wall where we met before."

"Never fear to trust Ralph Riley," said the honest fellow, starting off at once, and drawing his coat-sleeve across his eyes; "he'd give up his old life now, if he could save his birdie."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ I am a woman ! nay, a woman wronged . ”

Savage.

“ Ten thousand curses fasten on ’em both !

Now will this woman, with a single glance,

Undo what I ’ve been laboring all this while ! ”

Addison.

‘ I WILL be there ! ’ Such was Myrtie’s simple response to Charlie’s earnest appeal ; but how fraught with meaning were those little words, speaking courage and hope to his heart ! Yes, Myrtie would be there, he did not doubt, though by what means he could not divine ; and he, too, *must be there*, difficult as seemed any way of escape. How intensely was every thought bent on the accomplishment of his purpose ! Plan after plan was rejected, and still, as the time drew nigh, the poor boy was more distracted than ever. Father Ambrose, in his sympathy, attributed Charlie’s dejection to the loss of Marguerite, and strove by added kindness to soothe his heart.

“ Charlie,” said he, one evening, “ I noticed at vespers, to-day, you looked more troubled than usual ; can I do anything to cheer you ? ”

"You have already loaded me with kindness," replied Charlie, gratefully; "I know of no more that you can do, unless—unless—" and he hesitated.

"What is it, my dear boy? You can surely speak without reserve to me."

"I *should* so like to visit Marguerite's grave!" said Charlie; "she was such a friend to me and Myrtie!"

Father Ambrose thought a moment, and then, without a suspicion of the boy's real design, said, in a low voice,

"I am to be on guard, to-night, and, if it will be any comfort for you to visit her grave, you can do so without being noticed."

"O, I thank you a thousand times!" cried Charlie, as a bright gleam of hope flashed into his heart. "You could not confer a greater kindness. How long will it be safe for me to stay?"

"As long as you wish, my dear boy. I will let you in."

Charlie could scarce refrain from embracing him in his joy, as he thus saw the way open for his escape. But, wisely checking himself, he said, with a sad tone, "Poor Margery! she was all the friend Myrtie and I had for many years!"

"There," thought Ambrose, "I was right in conjecturing that her death caused such a change in him. I must try to favor him more." Then charging Charlie not to hasten home till he was ready, he left him, on good thoughts intent.

"Perhaps it is wrong to deceive him so," said Charlie to himself, when he was alone; "but, after all, it may make him less trouble than to know all about it. Farewell, good, kind Father Ambrose! the prayers of the boy you have befriended will ever follow you!"

To avoid suspicion, Charlie took nothing with him. But, arraying himself in the coarse, homely garb provided for him, he passed, with cautious steps, through the private entrance Ambrose had left unfastened for him, and, turning in an opposite direction from the cottage, crept along in the shadow of the wall till he gained safely the highway. O, how swiftly bounded his feet o'er the glad earth, as with a joyous heart he traced the way pointed out by Marguerite's brother! What though thirty long, weary miles lay before him. "Mother, Myrtie, and home!" was the watchword that lured on his unfaltering steps through that lonely midnight walk. Press on, brave boy! thy winged guide will bear thee safely along to the haven of thy hopes!

But Myrtie, — gentle, loving Myrtie, — how can she escape the sleepless vigilance which surrounds her? Not even to look on the cold, lifeless face of her childhood's guardian, was she suffered to pass those prison-walls, so strictly did they guard their treasure. But *an eye* which bolts nor dungeons can avert, though they heed it not, is now looking into that orphaned heart, with power to pity and save. Whence but from Him came the faith and hope which traced those simple lines of promise, "I will be there"?

When Ralph gave Myrtie the package Charlie had intrusted to him, she flew at once with it to Sister Agnes' cell.

"A letter from Charlie!" exclaimed the overjoyed girl; "only think, Sister Agnes, a letter from Charlie! — the first one he ever wrote me; and Ralph is going to wait for me to answer it. How can I ever tell him how much I love him — dear, dear Charlie!" And she tore open the precious missive as she stood by the nun's pallet, and together they devoured

each word and line of that earnest, agonizing appeal. Myrtie rubbed her eyes to assure herself she was not dreaming, and Sister Agnes hid her face in her hands in thoughtful silence.

"Well, Myrtie," said she, at length, "what reply will you give your noble brother?"

"I know not, Sister Agnes, and yet I think I shall go."

The nun looked up with astonishment into the face of the young girl, radiant with hope, till, catching the inspiration, she exclaimed, "Yes, Myrtie, I believe you will; tell him so."

Tearing a blank leaf from her prayer-book, Myrtie traced with a pencil those talismanic words, and gave them to Ralph, who, poor fellow, little knew the import of the message he was conveying. Charlie had cautioned her in his note not to reveal the matter to her old friend; so she suffered him to depart without telling him that he would not see her again. But the streaming eye and trembling voice with which she bade him farewell (in her heart a last one) lingered many a day in Ralph's memory, causing the answering tears to roll down his cheek as often as he thought of her emotion.

When Myrtie again sought Sister Agnes, she found her with flushed cheek and burning brow, intensely absorbed in the story Marguerite had written for their mother. O, what a strange revelation was there made of her own escape from a perjured and dishonorable marriage with the only one she had ever loved—and that one the father of her dear Myrtie! How she longed to see the patient, suffering woman who had been Charles Duncan's wife!—the woman she had unconsciously wronged in loving him! What an additional motive she had now to seek some way to restore Myrtie to her mother's arms!

And Myrtie, too!—how her cheeks tingled at the mention of her father's perfidy, little suspecting, though, that the proud Emilie De Vere and Sister Agnes were one!

All night long the feeble nun tossed restlessly upon her hard pallet. Visions of the past, in all their dread reality, came floating by; while the dim future, with its unknown terrors, stood like some gaunt spectre, ready to clutch its prey! One moment she seemed swiftly gliding through the air, encircled by Myrtie's arms, transformed into an angel's; and then from behind some dark cloud would peer forth a satanic face, in which she could trace the lineaments of her perfidious lover, when instantly she began to descend lower, lower, lower, till, in her fright, she woke to find herself alone in her cheerless cell!

Morning's gray light streamed through the aperture which served for a window; but Sister Agnes was too feeble to rise. Carefully concealing Myrtie's papers about her person, she summoned the portress, and requested the presence of the mother superior. Her spirit was stirred within her. *Save Myrtie she must*, though to accomplish it deception and fraud were necessary. To deceive such characters as she had to deal with, for such a purpose, seemed to her both right and just. When, therefore, that worthy personage appeared, in no very pleasant mood, Sister Agnes accosted her in the most humble manner, begging her forgiveness for all the trouble she had occasioned her.

"What good does all your penitence do," answered the mother, sharply, "so long as you refuse to obey the first command of the church?"

"That is just what I wished to see you about, this morning,"

said the nun. "It has been revealed to me to-night that I ought no longer to withhold my substance from the church. I feel more than ever that my life is rapidly wasting away, and what I do must be done quickly. Therefore, if you please, holy mother, I will attend to making my will without delay."

The superior was so taken by surprise with this change in Sister Agnes, that she scarcely knew what to reply. It seemed highly important to secure the object *now*, lest she should lose the effect of this sudden excitement (as she deemed it) of the sick nun's disordered imagination. But yet, in Father Bernaldi's absence, how could she manage it?

"You do not reply," continued Sister Agnes; "perhaps you deem me unworthy to make this offering."

"It is not that," said the superior, in a gentle tone; "your repentance, though it comes late, will doubtless be accepted. But he who should have the direction of this affair is absent, and I scarcely know how to proceed."

"You mean Father Bernaldi. How long will he be away?"

"He thought when he left it might be a month; but he may come sooner."

Sister Agnes could scarce contain her joy at this intelligence; it made her plan so much easier. "Heaven knows," cried she, anxiously, "whether I shall be alive on his return. Is there no one to whom this matter can be intrusted?"

"Your zeal is commendable," replied the mother, approvingly, "and I will consult the bishop at once."

"There is one," continued Sister Agnes, "if he is still living, who knows more definitely the extent of my possessions than I do. Indeed, I doubt if I could define them without his assistance."

“Who is that?”

“It is Mr. Stuart, the attorney who drew up my deeds. I think he now has them in his possession, and I should like to show him with what a hearty good-will I give them away.”

“I will think of this matter,” said the superior, rising to go, “and, now that you have come to a right decision, I shall have you removed at once to more comfortable quarters, and a nurse provided for you. Who should you prefer?”

“You are too kind, most excellent mother! I now see my great error in not sooner obeying you; but you shall lose nothing by it, I assure you. Perhaps you can best spare the little girl, and she will do for me at present.”

“I fear she is not old enough to take proper care of you,” interrupted the mother, kindly.

“Let her try a few days, and see.”

“Well, if you prefer it, she shall.”

Sister Agnes saw through this veil of hypocrisy, and though at another time she would have treated it with the contempt it deserved, she now determined to make use of it for Myrtie's sake, — yea, even to become a deceiver herself.

The superior was as good as her word, and in a few hours Sister Agnes found herself laid in a nice, clean bed, in one of their pleasantest rooms, with Myrtie at her side, as nurse. She, dear girl, was overjoyed at the change, though she did not understand why it was done; and Sister Agnes thought it not best to inform her of her plans till she could be more sure of their success; but she often wiped away her tears, and, smoothing her bright ringlets, assured her she should be saved.

The morning after these changes, Sister Agnes was not surprised at an early visit from the superior; for she rightly

conjectured that little else would claim the woman's attention till the momentous question of her will was settled.

"How do you find yourself, this morning, my daughter?" said she, in her blandest tone, approaching the bedside.

"I have n't rested so well for many a night, thanks to your nice, soft bed," replied the nun; "but still I feel that I am fast going."

"And how is your mind?"

"Clear and firm, especially since the holy resolution I made yesterday."

"Then you do not waver?"

"By no means; on the contrary, I was never more determined *to do right* than now."

"I am thankful to hear you express yourself so fully, for I came to talk with you on that subject. I have seen his holy reverence, the bishop, and he has no objection to the course you proposed; indeed, he thinks it a wise one, provided you are *steadfast* in your determination, and *will not* be influenced by any worldly opposition."

"Do not fear for me, holy mother. The whole world could not move me, so strongly have I set my heart upon this deed of justice."

"Well spoken, my daughter! You will therefore be prepared to meet the person you named at eleven o'clock. He has been notified, and will be here then. I trust I do not need to remind you of the duties you owe us, in any communication you may make to him."

"You can trust me," replied Sister Agnes, striving to conceal the agitation she felt at the approaching interview.

Eleven o'clock arrived, and the pale nun lay almost motion-

less on her pillow. She was again to see a familiar face — one, too, who had been her *father's* friend, and, but for her own blind folly, might still have been hers. Would he know her? *Could* he recognize, in her poor, emaciated form and shrunken face, the once bright and beautiful Emilie De Vere? Would he tell her of her father's last days, and, perhaps, confirm Bernaldi's dreadful report, that he died unreconciled to her? Would he — but here her heart almost ceased to beat, as the sound of footsteps came nearer and nearer, and the mother superior entered her room, accompanied by the stranger. Yes — it was he. Through her half-closed eyes she could see that he wore the same look, though age had furrowed his cheek and wrinkled his brow. O, how her heart longed to unburden itself to him! But her first thoughts must be given to Myrtie; and with this feeling she unclosed her eyes, as if just awaking from sleep. The mother softly moved to her side, and said, in a low voice, "He is here; are you ready?"

"I am," replied she, turning her face towards the attorney.

He started as he met her look, and a painful expression crossed his face, as of some unpleasant remembrance; but, unsuspecting of the *truth*, he advanced towards her and said,

"The lady superior tells me, ma'am, that you have a desire for my services in executing your will; shall I wait upon you now?"

"If you please, sir," was the feeble reply. Then, turning to the mother, she added, "Will it not be better for me to confer with the gentleman alone; the act will seem more free."

The superior winced a little at this proposal, but she could

make no plausible objection, and she therefore reluctantly withdrew.

"Now, sir," said the nun, summoning all her strength, "look at me; have you ever seen me before?"

"I was half-persuaded, just now, that I had," he replied; "there is something familiar about your face, and yet I do not know you."

"Well may you say that, for I do not know myself! Say, can you recognize in these wan features aught of one you knew as Emilie De Vere?"

The attorney gazed, with a startled look, into her face, as she uttered that name, and, seizing her hand, exclaimed,

"Can it be possible? Has the grave given up its dead, that I thus see you again, Emilie, daughter of my best friend?"

"An unworthy daughter of the noblest of fathers!" added she.

"And yet he blamed you not, but died with warm blessings on his lips for his misguided daughter."

"Was it indeed so?" cried she, eagerly. "O, what a weight of sorrow do you lift from my heart! *They* told me that he cursed me!"

"Who told you so?"

"Father Bernaldi."

"The wretch! — When your father *pleaded* so piteously to see you once more, that he might bless you, that priest said you had cast off all earthly attachments, and, the better to escape your own father's importunity, had taken the veil in a distant convent. I have supposed for a long time that you were dead, as all efforts to learn your fate have been futile."

Sister Agnes, overcome with emotion, sank back upon her pillow. Of what dark treachery had she been the victim! While pining under a father's *supposed* displeasure, and longing to throw herself at his feet for forgiveness, that father had been represented to her as inexorable in his determination not to see or forgive her; and death had come between them to set his silent seal upon that falsehood.

"What were your intentions, Emilie in sending for me?" asked the attorney, breaking the painful silence. "Are you ready to bequeath your property to these people, who have thus deceived you?"

"Never, *never*!" warmly exclaimed the nun; "even though I had not now discovered their perfidy, I had other thoughts, though they must not know it, — 't would be my death-warrant, at once. O, sir, your heart can never conceive what a living death I have suffered in this place!"

"You must leave it immediately, Lady Emilie, and be restored to your possessions and your home."

"No, sir, that can never be, and I do not *now* wish it. The sands of my life are nearly run, and with the few days that are left me I wish to make restitution where I have wronged, and save from an unholy grasp a lovely and innocent victim."

In a subdued tone Sister Agnes then told him the sad tale of the orphans — of their parentage, of her near approach to crime in wedding Sir Charles, of her own *intense* desire to save them from the dreadful fate which awaited them, and to restore them to the arms of that bereaved mother. She also told him of the opportunity which now offered for their escape, and begged, with an earnestness which could not be

resisted, that he would devise some plan to aid her in effecting it. His heart was moved, as indeed it could not otherwise be, and he promised to comply with her wishes as far as it was possible.

"Now," said he, "let us proceed to the business for which I was summoned, or suspicions may be aroused which will thwart our plans." So saying, he unfolded the papers he had brought with him, and, spreading them about on the table, he rang a little bell, and requested the presence of the superior.

"I find," said he, with a business-like air, as she came in, "that I have not the necessary documents for making out this instrument. Had I known that the *daughter of Lord De Vere* wished my services, I could have brought her papers, which are in my possession ; but, as it is, I await your further orders as to the time for another interview."

The superior eyed him closely as he said this, but she could detect no emotion in his countenance, and she therefore replied,

"I leave that to you, sir. In Sister Agnes' feeble condition, it may, perhaps, be as well to have these matters all concluded speedily, that her mind may be perfectly at rest."

"I agree with you entirely, madam, and, if you please, will wait upon you again to-morrow, at two o'clock."

"Very well, sir ; we shall expect you."

CHAPTER XXIX.

“ Press on ! There ’s no such word as fail .

Press nobly on ! the goal is near !

The wisdom of the present hour

Makes up for follies past and gone ;

To weakness strength succeeds, and power

From frailty springs. — Press on ! press on ! ”

“ To-day, dear Myrtie,” said Sister Agnes, as her young nurse hovered around her couch, with pale and anxious brow, “ to-day he has promised to effect some means for your escape ; and, O, how rejoiced shall I be to know that you are far beyond pursuit ! ”

“ It will be hard to leave you alone, Sister Agnes,” replied Myrtie.

“ I do not doubt it, my dear girl,” said the nun, affectionately ; “ but the little life there is left in me will soon be exhausted ; and how much more calmly shall I go to rest, knowing you are safe ! ”

“ Noble, generous heart ! ” murmured Myrtie ; “ Heaven will be your reward ! ”

“ I have written a few lines to your mother, Myrtie, and enclosed them in your package. They are for her eye alone.”

"Mother!" repeated the fair girl,— "mother! *Can* it be I shall ever know that name? 'T would be joy too great!"

"Yes, Myrtie," said the nun, with enthusiasm, "you will know and love that dear being,— my heart tells me that you will. But, when her warm and loving smiles gladden your life, do not forget poor Sister Agnes!"

"Forget you — never!" cried Myrtie, with streaming eyes. "If I am ever blest with a mother's love, she shall know that to you we owe the mutual gift; your name shall be ever on our lips!"

"Dear girl, how you have twined yourself about my heart since I first knew you! Keep near me to-day, Myrtie, for it is our last."

The affectionate girl threw her arms about the nun's neck, and, with sweet, winning words, sought to beguile the painfulness of their parting. But, within, her heart was struggling with fear and uncertainty. What if all their plans should fail, and her bright picture of home and its joys prove an illusion! O, how dark would seem the future, after such a foretaste!

Two o'clock came; and, punctual to his appointment, the attorney was ushered into the lady superior's private parlor, accompanied by the lad who brought his bundle of papers.

"I wish to ask you a few questions," said she, "before permitting another interview with Sister Agnes."

"I am most happy to confer with you, madam," he replied, very calmly.

"She has, of course, informed you who she is?"

"Yes; that was necessary."

"Did she give you any intimations that she would like to return again to the world?"

"On the contrary, madam, she averred that she remained here of her own free will and accord, and would upon no consideration leave you. These, I am happy to inform you, were her words."

"And you would testify to them, if necessary?"

"Certainly, madam."

"I am thankful, I assure you, that she speaks thus of the house where she has spent so many happy years. I did not know but her declining health might affect her mind otherwise; it would be a great trial to part with her now."

"No doubt of it, madam; she is a very lovely person."

"So she is, sir; and she seems so grateful for all we have done! Has she told you how she means to dispose of her property?"

"She has intimated something of the kind to me; and I think *you* will have no cause to be displeased, madam."

"O, we have no wish to control her in this matter," replied the superior, delighted at this insinuation. "You see, sir, that she acts freely, and without even our knowledge."

"I see, madam; and allow me to say I highly approve of your course. Shall I now proceed to her room?"

"If you please, sir," said the superior, leading the way.

Myrtie was with Sister Agnes as they entered the room, and the imploring look with which she met his gaze reached the lawyer's heart. In a stiff, formal manner he bade them "good-afternoon," and then, turning to the superior he said,

"Perhaps it will be as well, madam, for us to continue our interviews in a private manner;—however, it is as you say."

"I certainly have no objection," she replied, promptly, reassured by his recent confidence; and, motioning Myrtie to follow, she left the room.

"O, tell me at once, sir!" cried the agitated nun. "Is there any chance for her?—*can* you save her?"

"I think so; at least, I hope so," replied the lawyer. "But it will be necessary to keep yourself very calm, Lady Emilie, to avoid suspicion. Almost everything depends on presence of mind, now."

"Let me but know there is hope for her, and I will be as impervious as marble," was her impassioned answer.

"That is right," said he; "and now I will explain to you my plan." Carefully securing the door, he then opened the bundle, supposed to contain law papers and documents, and displayed to her astonished gaze a full suit of boy's clothes, well worn.

"There," said he, "I judged these would fit Myrtie; and, as my errand-boy is the same size, she can pass out with me in the evening, without suspicion. To carry away as large a bundle as I brought, you must roll up a suit of her clothes, for her use afterwards; these you will conceal very carefully till this evening, when I shall make an excuse to visit you again, and Myrtie must be prepared. I shall pretend to have forgotten something, and shall send my boy for it. Myrtie can easily personate the boy, and when outside the gates a messenger awaits her, who will convey her at once to the appointed spot. Do you approve this plan, Lady Emilie?"

"Most heartily, my dear sir! And I think it can be

accomplished without difficulty. O, sir! what do we not owe you for such noble efforts!"

"Do not speak of that, I pray you. To say nothing of the justice and mercy of the deed, Lord De Vere's daughter is entitled to any and every service I can render. But we must to business, or those gray eyes will see something wrong;" and the attorney plied his pen as assiduously as though nothing unusual had occurred.

"We proceed slowly, madam," said he to the superior, as he was about to leave. "Lady Emilie's possessions are very large, and, joined to those of the late Lord De Vere, make a princely fortune, which it requires no inconsiderable amount of time to detail in her will. I regret that other business occupies so much of my time just now."

"It is unfortunate," replied she; "particularly as her health seems failing so rapidly."

"If it would be agreeable to you," suggested he, "I might, perhaps, devote my evenings to her. What are the regulations of your house about admittance then?"

"We have none that would interfere with such an arrangement, as I could easily give the girl directions to admit you."

"Well, then, with your approval, I will commence this evening, and continue each successive one till the whole matter is settled."

She nodded her acquiescence, and he passed out, elated with this first success; while within, locked in each other's arms, trembling hearts awaited, in almost breathless silence, his promised return.

Twilight deepened into evening as the attorney, accompanied by the lad, — with some trepidation, it must be confessed, —

again, applied for admission to those inaccessible walls. A jolly, round-faced Irish girl, whom he had not seen before, opened the gate for him.

"Where is your mistress?" asked he.

"An' shure, is n't she in at vespers, an' the porthress, too? an' was n't I tould to let ye in, if ye be's the lawyer as comes to see the sick nun?"

"I am the one. What is your name, my good girl?"

"Johanna, sir, at your sarvice," said the girl, with a low curtsey.

"Well, Joanna," said he, slipping something into her hand, "you seem to be a nice girl. How long will they be in at vespers?"

"About a half an hour longer, sir. Bedad, he's a rale jintleman, any how," said she, glancing at her glittering palm, and then at his retreating form, "that's throe of him!"

"Now is the moment!" whispered he, thrusting his head into Sister Agnes' room. "Be quick, or it will be too late! I will wait here for her."

A smothered sob and kiss, and, sooner than he thought it possible, Myrtie came out in her disguise, and, without a word, followed him down stairs. The poor girl scarcely breathed with the intensity of her emotion; for on this moment she felt that her destiny hung.

"My good Joanna," said the attorney, "I find I have left some of my papers at home, and am going to send this boy after them. You will let him in when he returns, won't you?"

"Shure an' I will, yer honor," answered she, unbolting the gate, to let him pass through.

"Now, mind, Dick," said he, calling after the boy, "get the ones I told you, in the left-hand drawer. That fellow is so stupid!"

"He oughter be bright to serve yer honor," said Joanna, pertly.

"You think so, do you?" answered he, laughing. "Well, there's something for your compliment." And he put another coin into her hand, which completed her admiration of the "jintleman."

All this had passed so quickly, he could scarcely realize that the momentous deed was done! — that Myrtie was now swiftly distancing pursuit, and that both he and Sister Agnes must prepare themselves for the dénouement. As he returned to her room, the nun's calm and immovable face and manner astonished him. That she could so control the hidden fires that he knew were burning within her breast, rejoiced as well as surprised him.

"This is well, Lady Emilie!" said he, approvingly; "retain but your present immobility, and all will be safe. *She* is already beyond their reach!"

"Thank God!" was all that burst from her heart, in reply.

"Little as we both feel inclined for business," continued he, "we must *seem* to be engaged by it. I will now proceed to fill up these blanks, and then read them to you for correction. Remember, everything depends upon your prudence and discretion when the crisis comes!"

Very earnestly was the legal gentleman engaged in reading aloud to the nun descriptions of certain boundaries of land belonging to the De Vere estate, so that he heard not the superior's step as she came in and seated herself.

"These, then, make the sum-total of your possessions," exclaimed he, "which we will now proceed to bequeath, as you directed, to —— Ah, madam, excuse me! I was not aware of your presence. Am I encroaching on your stated hours for rest? Bless me!" he added, looking at his watch, "how time slips away when one is busy!"

"You was so buried in your papers, that I did not disturb you when I came in," the superior answered, pleasantly. "But, where is Myrtie? I thought she was here, Agnes!"

"Do you mean the little girl I saw when I came in?" asked the attorney.

"The same."

"I took the liberty of asking her to retire while we transacted our business," said he.

"She went in to vespers, I thought," added Sister Agnes.

The mother, with a troubled look, went out; but soon returned with the startling intelligence that the girl was nowhere to be found, and had not been seen by any of the sisters.

"What *can* have happened to her?" cried the nun, with assumed terror. "Do, my dear sir, lend your aid in finding her!"

"Certainly I will," replied he; "but do not alarm yourself needlessly; doubtless the girl will soon be found."

"'Tis *very* strange!" muttered the superior, leading the way to the chapel, which they searched in vain. She did not choose to initiate her companion into the dark mysteries and intricate windings of her great charnel-house; so she politely excused his further attendance, and, with a look of real alarm, hastened to arouse the inmates for a more thorough search.

"We are safe!" whispered he, as he bade Lady Emilie

good-night. "She has not the least suspicion. Only maintain yourself, and all will go right."

And all did go right! Though the alarum's shrill sound broke harshly on the still morning air, calling for aid in trouble; though its echo was heard in deep tones of warning from St. Augustine's chime; and though legions of vassals, in every form of disguise, searched with ceaseless diligence, and held in surveillance every avenue and port of the kingdom, *innocence triumphed over all!*

No sooner was Myrtie, in her strange dress, outside the convent-gate, than a hand was laid gently on her shoulder, and a voice whispered in her ear, "Follow me!" Trembling in every limb, she followed the light, quick step of her conductor, till they reached a deep wood, where he silently placed her in the carriage awaiting them; and, seating himself beside her, he said, kindly, "Keep up good courage — the worst is over!"

The spirited steed, as though conscious of his burden, bore them swiftly over hill and dale, and before even Myrtie's impatient heart expected they entered the suburbs of the city where dwelt the protector Marguerite had secured for the orphans. The cautious guide here stopped, and, leaving his horse at an obscure inn, they threaded their way carefully to the house designated in his directions. A long, weary hour were they in finding it, and not louder than Myrtie's heart did the knocker resound as they reached the door. A window above them was in a few moments raised, in answer to their summons.

"Does Captain Glynn live here?" asked the guide, in an under-tone.

"Yes — it's me. I'll be right down," said that worthy individual, half suspecting who they were; for, to tell the truth, he had thought of little else since he received Marguerite's letter; and every day his interest deepened to see the children who had so won his sister's heart.

In a few moments he opened his door to the new comers; but Myrtie's companion, giving her a bundle, said,

"I should much prefer to remain here while this young girl exchanges the garments she has on for her own, and then I will take them and return immediately."

"Young *girl*!" responded the host, with surprise. "Ah, yes, I understand, now — pretty well thought of, too. Come right in, my dear."

Myrtie gazed earnestly into his pleasant face, while a single word hovered on her lips — "Charlie!"

"Not here, yet," said he, cheerfully; "but you have come so safely, we'll hope the best for him."

Myrtie was in a new world now, with these kind-hearted people (for his wife had joined them). But all their entreaties could not prevail with her to eat or sleep till Charlie should share her happiness. Poor Charlie! — where was he?

"I tell you what, wife," said the captain, as the gray light began to appear in the east, "I guess I'll slip down to the 'Orient' and have everything put in full rig. These birds'll be caged again, mighty quick, if we don't get 'em out of the way."

"But what if the boy does not come?" queried she.

"It'll be bad business, that!" said he; "but somehow I think he will."

Buttoning up his fear-naught, the good sailor left the house, intent on his deed of mercy. He had proceeded but a few steps, when he noticed a boy at the corner of the street, looking anxiously around, as though uncertain what course to take.

"Where awa' now, youngster?" said he, hailing him.

"I'm only trying to find a house in this street," replied the boy, shrinking into the shadow of a building.

"Well, there's a fleet of 'em, you see," laughingly added the other; "which'll you hail?"

"Do you know if one Captain Glynn lives in any of them?" asked the boy, taking courage from the man's good-nature.

"Tack about, my lad! Yonder's your harbor; and, if your name's Charlie, there's a jolly welcome for you, my hearty!" The captain grasped the boy's hand warmly as he said this, and drew him towards his home.

"But, who are you?" asked the latter, wonderingly.

"Who am I? Why, the very cruiser you're after, my lad. My name's Captain Richard Glynn. Now, who are you?" he asked. But the merry twinkle of his eye told that he already suspected the truth.

"I am the boy dear Margery wrote you about. But *Myrtie* — O, where is she?" exclaimed Charlie, as they ascended the steps.

"Let's go in and see," said the other, taking a key from his pocket, with which he unlocked the door.

Myrtie, exhausted with fatigue and excitement, had thrown herself upon the sofa; and, in a half-dreamy state, she heard

the door open. Turning her head quickly, she sprang, with one bound, and was locked in her brother's arms! "Charlie!" "Myrtie!" was all that each could utter.

Again and again were the tears brushed from that manly, weather-beaten cheek, ere Captain Glynn could find voice to speak.

"Now, my hearties," said he, "we must lose no time, or those pirates'll be after you! Give 'em some breakfast, wife, while I am putting up my traps, and in one hour we'll have plenty of sea-room."

How proudly dashed the "Orient" o'er the swelling wave, bearing freight more precious than Eastern gems! How gently rocked the cradle of the deep, as old ocean sang the orphans' lullaby! How each shrill, raging wind hushed its voice, as on, still on, floated the charmed vessel to its destined port —
"MOTHER AND HOME!"

"Swift glides the wandering bark,
Bearing beloved ones o'er the restless wave;
O! let thy soft eye mark
Their course! Be with them, Holiest, guide and save!"

CHAPTER XXX.

“ A springing joy,
A pleasure which no language can express,
An ecstasy that mothers only feel,
Plays round my heart, and brightens up my sorrow,
Like gleams of sunshine in a lowering sky.”

“ I AM sorry to say it, my dear sir,” quoth the physician, ominously shaking his head, “ but nothing short of a miracle can save your wife ; and I am free to add, Mr. Graham, that but for you she would long ago have been in her grave.”

Robert Graham leaned heavily on the mantel, and a deep sigh shook his whole frame. “ Then there is no hope ? ”

“ None, that I can see,” returned the other ; “ she has been growing more feeble every year, and I fear the crisis cannot be far off. ’T is a sad case, — *sad ! sad !* ” and the kind-hearted doctor fell into a fit of musing, while Robert still leaned in deep revery.

“ Let ’s see ! ” at length said the former ; “ it ’s some twelve or thirteen years since that terrible event, is n’t it ? ”

“ Twelve years last May,” answered Robert, sadly.

“ It ’s a great pity that *justice* cannot reach such knaves,”

continued the doctor ; " my fingers have ached, many a time, to get hold of them."

" They are hidden by an impenetrable wall which sets laws at defiance everywhere," Robert replied ; " but, in this instance, we have every reason to believe they were aided by that poor, misguided Duncan."

" Well, *he* met with a pretty summary punishment, any how ! "

" Yes, he has found *one* tribunal that cannot be averted ; and so, at last, will those, his dark conspirators."

" Well, I must confess," said the doctor, " that this very case has done more to make me a sceptic than anything else. Just look at your wife ! A better woman never breathed, and yet her happiness, her life even, is sacrificed to the damnable wickedness of such villains. Now, if there is a God who watches over and takes care of his own, why does he suffer this ? Why permit such villany to go unpunished ? "

" We have just noted the sad end of one of them," replied Robert, " and who knows what may yet befall the rest ? Still, if in *this* world they prosper, we cannot doubt the terrible retribution which awaits them when the great Judge demands innocent blood at their hands."

" Supposing it is so, why should he allow so much suffering *here*, when, as you believe, he has power to prevent it ? "

" His *reasons* we know not here ; but, in the light of eternity, we shall see and admire the wisdom which has brought us, even through such dark ways, into his glorious presence."

" And your wife feels thus ? "

" Much more than I," said Robert, warmly ; " the spirit within her seems brightening ; her faith strengthens and, with

sweet trust and hope, she leans on Him who has bruised but to make her whole."

"There must be something," said the physician, thoughtfully, "for such faith to rest upon. Mrs. Graham has always been an enigma to me, and now more so than ever."

"Simply, my dear sir, allow me to say, because you have not learned that *cure* for every ill — trust in God!"

"Trust in God!" O, what need had Robert Graham of such faith! There lay Anna, his earthly idol, sinking slowly, but surely, to her grave. And what to him will this world be when she is gone? *Trust!* O, yes, he hath need of *perfect* trust, else will he sink in despair! See him now, as on his knees he bends in agony, crying, "Let but *this* cup pass from me!" What, save *heavenly* light, can pierce his darkness, and teach him this sweet submission — "Not *my* will, but thine be done!"

And she, too, that sad, gentle being, whom only his love has detained on earth — needs she not to draw from deep fountains of hope? Pale she lies, but, as she sees the dark, grim messenger gradually approaching with deadly aim, what angel of mercy, so like the one she has cherished for years, averts the dreaded shaft, and, turning its radiant face to hers, murmurs, "Mother and Home!" She sees her own image reflected in that face, and, stretching forth her arms, she cries, "My daughter — my own!" But, alas! fond mother, 't is only a dream — a vision of thy sickly imagination; thou must awake to find thy treasures still gone! Such a dream had Anna; and, as she told it with glowing breath to her husband, he wept that thus it could not be.

It was a warm, still night in August. Not a sound was heard; even the chirp of the cricket ceased, and the whippoorwill's song was lulled to rest. Asheville was buried in midnight silence. Scarce was this silence broken by the light steps of those who now approached the quiet village, as hand in hand they came along its public road, with eager eyes and burning hearts scanning each dwelling. At length, before the old stone mansion they stood — the elder, a boy, gazing with deepest interest at its porch, its yard, and, finally, at the great elm, whose overhanging branches covered its roof.

"There, Myrtie!" whispered he, "I remember that tree; this must be the place; but, O, I dare not knock! Perhaps *she* is dead!"

The girl threw herself upon his neck. "O, don't say so, Charlie! 't would break our hearts — dear, blessed mother!"

How sweetly echoed that word in her heart, as, with timid, trembling steps, they went up to the porch-door, and gently raised the knocker! But Morpheus reigned within, and louder must be the summons to open his gates. Again and again, each knock vibrating fearfully on their hearts, did they try to arouse the inmates.

"O, dear!" said Charlie, "I'm afraid nobody lives here! What shall we do?"

"Try once more," said Myrtie, tremblingly; and again the knocker was timidly raised, while their hearts almost ceased to beat.

"What was that noise?" said Mrs. Clayton, half waking from her slumbers.

"I did n't hear anything," replied her husband.

"I am quite sure I did; and it seems to me I have heard

it two or three times in my sleep," said she, rising and going to the window.

"Bless me! here *is* somebody at the door! — who *can* it be?"

This thoroughly aroused her husband, and he quickly sprang to his feet and raised the window.

"What's wanting?" he asked.

A whispered consultation at the door, and then "Does Anna Clayton live here?" inquired a voice below.

"Anna Clayton! who do you mean?" said he, with astonishment.

"Her name used to be Anna Clayton," answered the voice, more boldly; "but afterwards 't was Anna Duncan."

"Wife! wife! what does this — what *can* this mean?" cried the old man, completely bewildered; "here is a boy and girl inquiring for Anna. O, my God! if it should be!" but the sentence was left unfinished, for, with his first words, his wife had flown down stairs. In a moment he was at her side and as the light which he held in his hand fell upon the face of the young girl, he exclaimed,

"My child! the image of my Anna!"

What joyful greetings, then, for the young wanderers! What open hearts to receive them! but "*mother*" is first upon their lips.

Then comes the story of her sufferings — of the noble devotion of him who is worthy to be called their father, and of their lovely home near by. Charlie listened with a swelling heart; but Myrtie was so full of joy, she could hear naught, save that, when morning dawned, she should be in her mother's arms.

Then Charlie told of their escape from their hated prisons; of dear, kind Capt. Glynn, who brought them safely over to New York, and placed them in a vessel bound for Boston; and how from there they travelled through the day, and at night found shelter in some comfortable farm-house, till now they had reached their home. Wonders ceased not when the morning sun dawned on the little group, so earnestly engaged. But who shall now bear to that mother these tidings of great joy? May not its excess break the frail tenure which binds her spirit to earth?

Robert Graham had just risen from his sleepless couch. All night had those dread words sounded in his ear, — “no hope — no hope!” No hope for her, the suffering victim of popish barbarity; and no hope for him whose *all of earth* must soon lie beneath the sod! The morning sun threw its first beams upon his kneeling form, as in secret anguish he pleaded for strength in his hour of trial and darkness. Does not that bright ray speak life and hope into his soul? He looks up, he sees the omen and accepts it, and with a lighter heart does he go forth to duty.

Scarcely had he descended to the parlor, when a light knock at the outer door brought him thither.

“My master and mistress want you to come right over there,” hastily said the messenger.

“Why, Maria, what has happened? Is anybody sick or hurt?”

“No sir, but they told me not to say anything — only to ask you to come over quick.”

“’Tis very strange,” said he, as he prepared to obey the

summons, at once. "What *can* they want of me at this early hour?"

Then, looking in upon the pale face of his wife, as she still slept, he quietly slipped out of the house, and with rapid steps entered the old mansion. But at its threshold he stopped, gazing with amazement on the tableau before him. For, upon either end of the sofa sat Squire Clayton and his wife, while between them, affectionately clasping a hand of each, were two, whose faces, though he had never seen them, were as some familiar dream.

"Tell me," cried he, agitatedly, "what does all this mean? Whose are these?"

"Can you not suspect, Robert?" answered the Squire, with a beaming face, as he pointed significantly to Myrtie, whose sweet smile reflected so strongly her mother's.

"It is *her* smile! — But — no — it cannot be! — Tell me — O, tell me, I pray you!" and he stretched forth his hands, in his earnestness.

Charlie rose, and, with inimitable sweetness, taking one outstretched hand, and placing Myrtie's within the other, said, "We are your children, *father*!"

O, with what a strong, loving embrace were they gathered to that noble heart, as, with more than paternal tenderness, he uttered, "*My son — my daughter*!"

"Take us to our mother!" said Myrtie, still clasping his hand.

"God only knows how I shall break this to her!" replied Mr. Graham. "But, come, my children, — and you too, father and mother; 't is meet we should all gather beneath one roof to-day."

'T were difficult to tell whose limbs tottered most as they entered Robert Graham's dwelling — those aged ones', who had been brought to see the day for which they had so long prayed; the little ocean-tossed mariners', now at last safely moored, though still tremblingly murmuring "mother and home;" or the fond husband's, with every thought, in this great moment, centering on the *fearful* joy thus brought to one dearer than all.

"Has my wife yet waked, Susan?" asked he.

"Yes — sir — no — sir," answered the housekeeper, abstractedly, gazing from one to the other with a strange look.

"O, I forgot, Susan!" added Mr. Graham, with a smile. "You must share our joy; these are the little ones you used to tend."

"I knew it — *I knew it!*" exclaimed she, hugging them alternately. "'T is the same face little Charlie used to wear, — and the baby too! How they've grown! O, my mistress will *die* for joy!" and the faithful girl was almost beside herself with delight.

Burdened with the joyful mission, Robert Graham sought his wife's apartment. How strangely bright everything seemed to him now! Even Anna's face glowed with new light as she welcomed him with a cheerful smile. "What, up and dressed so soon!" said he. "You are certainly stronger, Anna."

"I have rarely enjoyed such sleep as I did last night," she replied; "and this, together with those bitters the doctor left me, have given me rather an unnatural strength, I think."

"I am thankful, dearest; for you need it all"

She looked up with surprise into his face. "What is it, Robert?" said she. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied he, unable to control his agitation, "that joy such as she dreams not of awaits my beloved wife!"

"Surely, Robert," and she grasped his arm, convulsively, "you do not mean—you have not heard—"

"No, dearest, I have heard nothing, but I have *seen* them!—seen your darling children, Anna!—and they are *now under this roof*, waiting for a mother's blessing!"

"Where—O, where!" cried she, wildly rushing to the door; but Robert touched the bell, and in an instant two light forms sprang into their mother's arms!

Is there aught of earth in a scene like this?—Rather, are not angels encircling the little group, breathing heaven's sweet incense upon them, and setting its glorious seal on this sacred reünion of hearts?

CHAPTER XXXI.

“Joy never feasts so high
As when the first course is of misery.”

Joy! joy! all now is joy in that blest home! Even the good doctor doubts no longer a kind overruling Providence, and the Quaker refers triumphantly to his spirit's prophecy. But what are doubts and prophecies now to that happy household, whose hearts are filled with gladness! The ebbing tide of life flows back again to the mother's breast, as she pillows her head in the loving arms of her noble boy, or bends her ear to catch the sweet tones of Myrtie's winning voice as she fondly murmurs “Mother!”

As the first tumult of joy subsides, and eager questions draw forth the children's tale, what dark revelations are made of a plot so infamous that their hearts quake with horror! Marguerite's testimony was read with glistening eyes and forgiving tenderness, while over Lady Emilie's sad fate they wept tears of heartfelt sympathy. Ralph's name became at once a household word where Myrtie dwelt, and his kindness and unbounded devotion an unceasing theme of grateful remembrance. Father Ambrose, too, was not forgotten—an important though unwitting aid in Charlie's escape. The

humane attorney, the faithful guide, and last, though not least, the kind-hearted Captain Glynn, each received their meed of praise from overflowing hearts.

Anna read in secret the lines traced to her by the hapless nun, and no eye save his who shared her every thought was permitted to see them. Thus breathed that noble spirit to its gentle sister :

"I have wronged you deeply, sweet, suffering mother of my darling Myrtie ! but till now I knew it not. Heaven in mercy spared me the guilt of receiving those perjured vows, and saved you from dishonor. For the sake of her who has so sweetly beguiled two years of my lonely lot, and who bears away with her all of heart I have left, you will, I know, forgive the wrong. I shall never see your face on earth ; but will not the dear girl who binds my soul to yours unite us forever in perfect love ?

"Let us deal gently with the dead ! His errors, though great, are not for us to expose. Rather let the cold earth shroud them from our hearts that we, too, may find forgiveness at last. You will soon hear from me again ; and when you read my last testimony of love for your matchless child, will you not breathe a prayer for the soul of her who has gone — ah, whither ?"

"O, Popery !" exclaimed Robert, as he ceased reading, "where will thy machinations end ? No victims are too noble or exalted for thy ruthless hand !"

"Poor Lady Emilie !" said Anna ; "she must have endured terrible sufferings."

"No doubt ; but *could* they have been greater than yours, Anna ?"

"Perhaps not," and Anna shuddered ; "but I have been surrounded with sympathy and love, while in the cold, solitary walls of her cell what alleviation could there be ?"

"One comfort she must have now, though, since she has rescued our child from her dreadful fate."

"I shall never, *never* forget her!" fervently uttered the happy mother.

The village bell pealed forth joyous notes as from house to house the tidings quickly spread that the lost children had returned. Friends and neighbors thronged, with eager sympathy, to clasp their hands, and hear the wonderful story.

Not a heart was unmoved at the recital; deep-swelling indignation burned in every breast that such an atrocious crime had been perpetrated in their midst, and left them no power for redress. Even Bridget conceded to Mrs. Lindsey that there "might be some bad praasts, though Father O'Brady warn't the likes of 'em, shure."

But at night, when this day of glad greetings was over where could happier hearts be found than those gathered in the no longer desolate home? The blissful smile resting on Anna's cheek told of joy that had long been a stranger there; and her husband's soul spoke through the beaming eye with which he gazed on his restored treasure — restored by scarcely less than a miracle! Bessie rejoiced as truly in their happiness as she wept in their grief; and the whole-souled Quaker craved no greater earthly good. The venerable father, too, was there, relieved at last from the dread consequences of his mistaken ambition. But who had hearts so light, spirits so free and joyous, as the unprisoned captives? "Mother and Home" was to them no longer a beautiful vision, as they revelled in the bright, sweet *reality* of their dreams. Do not

such moments well-nigh efface the past, as hope gilds with its own radiant beams a happy future?

"Come, children," said Squire Clayton, as the evening closed, "we must let our little travellers seek the rest they so much need. Can we separate without blessing the glorious Giver for this our deep, unutterable joy?"

Then, as every knee bent responsive, his soul broke forth in strains of thanksgiving and praise, rapturous and heavenly. Charlie and Myrtie looked on in wonder. They knelt as did the rest; but where was the crucifix, where the formula to which they were accustomed? Myrtie gently took from her bosom the rosary and cross which she always wore, and commenced her usual devotions; but Charlie listened with awe to those deep spirit-breathings, and forgot all else in this first prayer that ever reached his ear.

"Dear mother," said Myrtie, when they were alone, "I did n't see any of you pray to-night."

"Did n't *see* us pray, darling — what do you mean?"

"Why, where was your rosary, mother?"

A tear dimmed Anna's eye as she gently replied, "I fear my daughter has been taught to regard only the *form* of prayer. We do not believe in such worship as you have been accustomed to, Myrtie."

"I noticed grandfather did n't pray to the Holy Virgin, as we do, but it seemed strange to me. — Surely you do, mother?"

"God forbid that I should ever pollute my lips with such blasphemy, Myrtie!"

"Why, mother, you frighten me! Who *do* you pray to?"

"To that God who alone sustained me when bereaved of

you, my darling, and who is infinitely precious to every child of sorrow and want."

Myrtie looked with surprise and admiration at her mother's beautiful face, lighted up with holy fervor.

"And don't you say mass, mother?"

"No!"

"Nor matins, nor vespers?"

"No, my dear child; we abjure all these worse than senseless forms, and cling with simple, earnest faith to the cross of him who died to save our souls."

"Who was that, mother?"

"Jesus, our only Saviour. Can it be that *my* children have yet to learn that precious name?" and the mother bowed her head and wept.

"Forgive me, dear mother!" said Myrtie, throwing her arms about her neck; "I did not mean to cause you such tears. I am sure whatever *you* believe must be right; only it seems so strange to me."

And strange was it, both to Charlie and Myrtie, to witness such simple, unobtrusive piety, so strikingly contrasted with the noisy, unmeaning ceremonies of the church in which they had been nurtured. But gradually a purer light shone upon their souls, and ere long they too knelt at the same altar and worshipped the God of their mother.

It cannot be supposed that an event of so great importance, and so nearly concerning the honor and integrity of the "Mother Church," would be long in reaching the ears of her watchful emissaries. In less than a week after the return of Sir Charles Duncan's children, all the gossiping rumor of the

neighborhood was faithfully transcribed, and despatched, with all possible speed, to the "Very Rev. Bishop Percy." While this important message is quickly traversing its watery path, the inmates of the chateau are becoming more and more perplexed at the unaccountable disappearance of their young victims. The most severe scrutiny of every person connected with the convent could elicit no information concerning Myrtie.

The gates had been kept securely barred, as usual; no one had passed through them except the lawyer and his errand-boy. He, of course, could know nothing of the matter, being at the time deeply engaged with Sister Agnes. How or when she could have escaped their vigilance, was an unfathomable mystery to the lady superior; and if, perchance, she got outside their walls, what unearthly power had she to evade so effectually their swift-footed messengers, who left no spot unsearched through the land? Ah! Lady Mother, for once thy base, crafty wiles have been foiled by a power thou knowest not of—the sleepless guardian of innocency!

Father Ambrose, though suffering severe penalties for the indulgence which he was forced to admit he had granted to Charlie, secretly rejoiced in the boy's escape. But Ralph,—who can describe the unselfish joy of his honest heart, when told that his birdie had flown, none knew where, and that Charlie had gone too! What though he would no longer look upon the face he worshipped, or hear again the song of his lark,—was it not better thus than to see her young life pining away in cold solitude?

"I feel drefful lonesome like," said he to himself, one day, as he walked towards the deserted cottage, and seated himself

on its well-remembered step. How changed was even that lonely spot! The little voice whose music so charmed his soul had fled; and she who alone could have sympathized in his loneliness lay beneath yonder mound in death's still sleep! The joyous notes of the birds seemed to mock him with their gladness. "Any how," continued he, brushing away the tears that would fall thick and fast, "I'm mighty glad she's got away from those 'tarnal old critters, over there. She's free now, and happy too; but I reckon if she knowed how her old Ralph's heart aches, she'd a let him foller her. I don' know, but it seems to me I can't stan' it much longer, no how. These old bones 'll soon lay close to Margery's, yonder, if I've lost my birdie. Any how, I'm glad she's gone; 'cause now she'll have a mother to love her. I wonder if she thinks of her poor Ralph, who'd die for her any minit!"

Bide thy time, good, honest soul! thou'lt ere long see what a place thou hast in thy "birdie's" heart.

A grim and shadowless messenger had, despite their bolts and bars, entered the convent, and laid his icy fingers on the heart of a penitent sister. How that magic touch froze every stream of life, and left the soulless clay like sculptured marble! Noble birth, disappointed hopes, and degraded misery, were all forgotten in that breathless slumber; and she who lay there so cold and still wore a peaceful smile, as though angels were chanting forth her last, best deed on earth!

The deep-toned convent bell tolled the knell of the departed sister; friends gathered around her bier, and the once proud and haughty Lady Emilie was borne to her father's halls,

beneath the sable pall. O, must her requiem be tuned by the heartless wretches who have, drop by drop, distilled her life's blood !

After the last sad rites had been performed, and Lady Emilie entombed beside her father, the attorney drew Bernaldi aside, and, placing a heavy package in his hand, said,

"I was requested by her whose obsequies we have just attended to give you the munificent sum of one hundred guineas, that masses may be said for the repose of her soul ; and I am further instructed by her to say that in three months from this day her will is to be opened and read in the presence of you all."

The priest bowed low as he pressed the golden weight in his hands. "Sister Agnes' word has ever been my law," whined he, "since she first devoted her life to piety and good works."

The lawyer bit his lips, but said nothing.

"I well remember," continued Bernaldi, "how trying it was to me to communicate to her noble father, the late Lord De Vere, her determination to shut out all worldly thoughts and objects from her heart, and give herself up to be the bride of heaven. But her pleadings that I would bear the message were not to be resisted."

"And that communication killed him," laconically added Mr. Stuart.

"I know it grieved him to the soul," said the priest ; "but Sister Agnes was inexorable, and so there was no remedy."

"She must have had a very hard heart, then."

“No, she had not; but her mind was so filled with ecstatic enjoyment, she lived above the world, as though it were not worthy a thought. Hers was, indeed, a bright example,” — here Bernaldi’s emotion overcame him, and he pressed his snowy handkerchief to his eyes, with well-dissembled grief.

The lawyer turned away with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, but the priest soon rejoined him, and said, in a low voice, “About Lady Emilie’s will — why did she not wish it read for so long a time?”

“I cannot tell you, sir,” replied Mr. Stuart. “I do not hold myself responsible for Lady Emilie’s actions, or her will either. I am merely her servant in this matter.”

“You have seen enough, though, to convince you that there has been no compulsion in her case?”

“Most certainly, my good sir father priest,” said the other, with a peculiar smile. “Lady Emilie has, *I know*, acted with a free and hearty good-will in the disposal of her immense fortune. But, ’t will be quite unexpected to these *friends* of hers, won’t it?” and he touched the priest’s arm significantly.

This made certainty doubly sure in Bernaldi’s mind; and he whispered, as he parted with him, “You shall lose nothing by your job, I promise you.”

The lawyer bowed, smilingly, and returned to his home to pen a letter “to the guardian of Myrtilla Duncan, daughter of Sir Charles and Anna Duncan, of Asheville.”

The contents of that letter seemed to give him peculiar satisfaction; for every few moments he would drop his pen, and, rubbing his hands together, exclaim, “Noble deed!” —

“just requital!” — “who could deserve it more?” — “Lady Emilie, thou hadst a noble soul!” etc.

“Great commotion there’ll be when that will is read,” soliloquized he. “It will be quite as well, I think, for me to improve the opportunity to travel abroad; and, as Lady Emilie’s generosity will enable me to do it, I think I shall.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

' Here are a few of the unpleasantest words
That ever blotted paper.'" SHAKSPEARE.

" 'Tis modesty in sin to practise every
Disguise to hide it from the world ;
But creatures free from guilt affect the sun,
And hate the dark, because it hides their innocence."
SIR W. DAVENANT.

" 'Tis passing strange," said Bernaldi, glancing at the open letter he held in his hand, and which he had just read, "'tis passing strange how those children could have escaped from our hands! Somebody outside must have helped them, that's certain."

"A very sage conclusion, truly," replied Bishop Percy, ironically, "when the poor simpletons never stepped beyond our bounds, and could not have known one road from another."

"Well, whoever it was," continued Bernaldi, "he has managed to dodge us pretty well."

"Have you any suspicions of the real villain?" asked the other.

"No; I cannot say that I have. I should n't be surprised,

though, if that Robert Graham had kept his spies about us all the time."

"They must have grown old in his service, then, before they accomplished anything; thirteen years is a good while to watch. No — I suspect the trouble lies nearer home than that."

"Who do you mean?"

"I cannot help associating that wretch of a Marguerite with this matter. She appeared very strange before she died; and the boy was with her the last day."

"That should n't have been allowed," said Bernaldi, quickly.

"Nor was it, with my knowledge. Ralph managed to get him there."

"Ralph must be looked after. I fear he knows more than he will confess. Put him to the torture, at once!"

"I really think it would do no good; he is too simple to deceive us. I've cross-questioned him so much, I should have detected any signs of guilt."

"After all, our trouble is n't so much *how* they got away, as what we shall do now they've escaped us."

"True," replied the bishop; "and I'm for securing the property, first of all."

"How can that be done?"

"I confess I am a little puzzled, myself, to know precisely *how*; but, supposing a will were to be *found* among Sir Charles Duncan's papers, giving to us — I mean the church — the whole of his property, — what then?"

"Why — then — I suppose we could get it; but it would

be pretty difficult to try that game now, the old lady has been dead so long."

"I don't know about that; we have got to make a most desperate effort, or we shall lose all."

"Plaguy curses those young ones have been to us, ever since we had them! I wish, now, we'd just shut up their mouths, to begin with!" exclaimed Bernaldi, angrily.

"It would have been better, as it has turned out," said the bishop; "but let us think of something more agreeable, now. My plan of a will may succeed yet. We may reckon pretty surely on Lady Emilie, from what you have said."

"No doubt of her, now. The dead don't change nor run away. And, besides, her attorney as good as told me it was all right. Pretty sum we've got for masses, have n't we?"

"Yes; I suppose she did that to give us a foretaste of what's coming. We must get this Duncan affair arranged before her will comes out, for we may have a quarrel with her heirs."

"When we get possession of those two immense estates," said Bernaldi, greedily, "we can afford to rest a while, and enjoy life."

"Which we will do, my good Alphonso," replied the bishop, slapping him on the shoulder.

The day came, at last (as all days will), when the future possessor of Ravenswood and its princely revenues was to be made known to the world. Beyond the circle of expectants little was said or thought of it. Every one supposed it would fall, as a matter of course, to the only brother of the late Lord De Vere, who, for the last ten or twelve years, had held

the property in trust for Lady Emilie, should she ever appear to claim it. So quietly and discreetly had the attorney, Mr. Stuart, managed the whole affair, since his first interview with the sick nun at the convent, that neither her uncle nor other friends had the most remote idea of the disposition she had made of her fortune. When, therefore, each notified guest presented himself, at the appointed time, within the spacious drawing-rooms, he was received with a stare and shrug by the rest, as though their own expectations were thereby proportionably lessened. Still in they came. But what a motley group! Here, an old decrepid servant, who had known Lady Emilie in childhood; there, the faithful nurse who had tended her footsteps from infancy; near by, some distant relative, who had long been forgotten by all, save her whose own wretchedness quickened her remembrance of the unfortunate. Now, with the step and mien of a lordly possessor, comes the bishop in full canonicals, and by his side the smooth-tongued priest, with face wreathed in smiles, as he bows condescendingly to all around him. One and another follows, till the rooms are nearly filled, and Bernaldi begins to wonder whence and why they came. Then, as the notary makes his appearance, accompanied by Lady Emilie's attorney and two or three witnesses, all thoughts are concentrated on the business before them. Carefully arranging the papers on the table, and placing a large unsealed package before the notary, Mr. Stuart, with evident embarrassment, turned to the expectant guests.

"I wish," said he, "to clear myself from every imputation of connivance in this matter. That I remonstrated with her whose will we are about to hear on her extraordinary dis-

possession of her vast possessions, you have her testimony. In this note, written but two days before her death, she says to me :

“ ‘ Your intentions, I have no doubt, are good, in trying, as you do, to dissuade me from my purpose. But my mind is settled immovably ; and I therefore beg your *immediate* attention to the necessary forms, etc.’ ”

“ You will see by this,” continued Mr. Stuart, “ that Lady Emilie acted freely and independently ; and, though to most of you the result will be unexpected, and perhaps offensive, you must, one and all, exonerate me from any responsibility in the matter. Will you do so ? ” asked he, pleasantly, turning his eye upon the bishop and Bernaldi. The latter instantly rose, and, looking round very smilingly, replied,

“ I think I can answer for us all, my dear sir, that, whatever may occur, you have proved yourself free from blame.”

“ Do you all thus judge me ? ” again asked the lawyer. And, as every head bowed assent, the notary added, with a smile,

“ This is rather an unusual proceeding, I think. Lawyers are never held responsible for their clients’ actions.”

“ You will see my reasons, presently,” whispered Mr. Stuart, “ if you will proceed with your duties.”

The notary then rose, and, midst breathless silence, broke the important seal. At the same moment the lawyer touched the bell-cord near him, and the summons was at once answered by the entrance of two persons, unknown to all but the bishop and priest. An involuntary exclamation of surprise and rage burst from their lips as the two new comers very quietly seated themselves. But the voice of the notary recalled

their attention, as, with a clear, distinct enunciation, he read bequest after bequest to this, that and the other tried and faithful servant or friend, not one of whom was forgotten by the grateful daughter of Lord De Vere. Then to her uncle, the only surviving member of the family, she bequeathed her homestead — the mansion in which they were assembled, with all its dear, familiar associations. Next, her father's counselor and friend, as well as her own, — he who had brightened the last few days of her life by his unwearied kindness and sympathy, — was affectionately remembered in the gift of ten thousand pounds.

"Now," thought Bernaldi, "comes our turn! All these don't amount to a third of her wealth."

"All the rest and residue of my property," continued the notary's loud voice (here followed long and minute descriptions), "I, Emilie De Vere, being of sound mind, do give and bequeath to Myrtila, daughter of Sir Charles and Anna Duncan, and her heirs forever."

"I pronounce that will a forgery!" screamed Bernaldi, utterly unable to control his fury at this astounding finale. "And you, sir, are the perpetrator of it!" shaking his finger at the younger of the two strangers before mentioned.

"Calm yourself, my dear sir," said the notary; "such language cannot be allowed here. This will is too well attested to be disputed."

"And *you*, you villain!" continued Bernaldi, without heeding the remark, as he rushed up to the attorney, "*you* knew it all, and was accessory to it. You shall feel my vengeance for this!"

"Yes," added the bishop, with a flashing eye, "it was all

a contrived plot between them ! But they shall be thwarted, yet !”

“ Friends !” said the elder stranger, “ thou hadst better be a little chary of thy charges. Dost remember a certain plot in which thou and one Marguerite were so nearly concerned ? And who was ‘ *thwarted* ’ there ? ”

“ Confound that devilish old fool ! ” whispered the bishop, drawing Bernaldi aside, “ he ’ll blab the whole thing right out here, if we provoke him ! Let ’s go home, and see what we can do ! ”

“ I am sorry to see thee leave us now,” said the stranger, as they prepared to go ; “ for my friend Robert, here, has yet a little business with thee. However, we will call at thy home.”

“ Concentrated rage and bitterness are in those men’s souls,” said Mr. Stuart, after they had left. “ You and I must look out for ourselves, Mr. Graham.”

“ I trust I shall not be long detained in their neighborhood,” replied the other. “ I find, though, since my arrival, more work than I expected ; for Lady Duncan’s death is news to me.”

“ Really, then, you have another property to secure for your little heiress.”

“ Yes ; and, as guardian to the children, I bespeak your counsel and immediate attention to the matter.”

“ And I accept the trust without hesitation ; for, do you know, I am getting deeply interested in your little wards. I feel half tempted to cross the water to see them.”

“ Nothing would give us greater pleasure than to have you accompany us home ; and I can insure you a hearty welcome there.”

"I'll go," said Mr. Stuart, warmly; "and, in the mean time, I will serve you with my best ability here."

Rumor's thousand tongues quickly spread the news of Lady Emilie's will far and near, greatly to the dismay of the discomfited bishop and priest; for, now that the existence of Sir Charles Duncan's children became known, conjecture was rife as to the next occupant of Beechgrove. Thus far, since Lady Duncan's decease, it had remained deserted and tenantless, and its immense income had been paid over to the treasury of the holy church by Sir Charles' late attorney, who dared not question Bernaldi's pretended claim. But now the time for action had come; and deep indeed and well-played must be their game, to meet the *open* demands of truth and equity. Infuriated beyond the power of expression by their repeated defeats, Bernaldi and the bishop nerved themselves for a most desperate conflict over this last hope — the possession of Beechgrove and its fortunes. But more even than this was at issue; for, failing to substantiate their claims, would not character, reputation, *everything* be lost, and their long-lived villany brought to light?

The morning after Lady Emilie's will had been made known, as Mr. Markland, the late Sir Charles' attorney, sat busily writing in his office, three gentlemen were ushered into his presence, for whose visit he was well prepared by a long night's conference with Bernaldi. Advancing with great cordiality, he greeted Mr. Stuart, whom he knew, very warmly.

"Allow me," said the latter, "to introduce my friends Messrs. Lee and Graham, from America. We have given you an early call this morning," continued he, "that the business

which detains them here may be concluded as speedily as possible."

"And may I ask what connection I have with that business?" said Mr. Markland, blandly.

"Certainly sir; we come to prove to you the right and title of certain heirs to the late Sir Charles Duncan's property, of which we understand you have the charge."

"I hold Sir Charles' papers in my possession yet; but are you aware that he left a will, Mr. Stuart?"

"A will! Is it possible, Mr. Markland?"

"Yes, sir; Sir Charles left a will to be executed after his mother's decease."

"And what is the tenor of that will, Mr. Markland?"

"You can see for yourself, if you like," replied the attorney, going to a small closet and taking therefrom a paper which he handed to Mr. Stuart. The latter examined it very closely, and a strange expression rested upon his face as he returned it.

"Why has not this will been executed before now?" said he.

"A pressure of business has prevented it," replied the other; "but I am intending to settle it forthwith."

"You have, of course, in obedience to this instrument, handed over the proceeds to Father Bernaldi."

"I have, except a sufficient sum for the maintenance of Lady Duncan."

"How much, in all, should you judge you have paid?"

"Really, Mr. Stuart, I don't know that I ought to answer all your questions; however, there is no harm in this, that I see. I have his receipt for fifty thousand pounds."

“ I will not press you further, Mr. Markland ; but, as I am acting for the legal heirs of Sir Charles, you will concede to me the right of an investigation of his affairs.”

“ Certainly, Mr. Stuart ; no one can object to that.”

“ Very well ; then I will appoint a meeting here, if you please, to-morrow, at this hour, and will trouble you to notify all interested persons to be present.”

“ I will do so, though I see no reason for such a meeting.”

“ What has that fellow got into his head now ? ” said Mr. Markland to himself, after they had left. “ I must go right over and see Father Bernaldi about it ; there’s something in the wind, I’m afraid ; ” and more carefully than Mr. Stuart had done did he examine every word and line of the will. “ This certainly is all straight ; there can be no mistake here. Pshaw ! he can’t do anything about it.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

——— “ All your attempts
Shall fall on me like brittle shafts on armor,
That break themselves ; or like waves against a rock,
That leave no sign of their ridiculous fury
But foam and splinters. My innocence like these
Shall stand triumphant ; and your malice serve
But for a trumpet to proclaim my conquest.
Nor shall you, though you do the worst fate can,
Howe'er condemn, affright an honest man !

RALPH worked away in his garden that afternoon in silence and sadness. Years seemed to have passed over him in the last few months, bending still lower his ungainly form, and dragging more heavily his slow and awkward step. His heart was “ clean gone,” as he said, “ after his birdie, and he should n't stan' it much longer, he knew.” So abstracted was he, as his hands busily plied the spade, that he was not aware of the presence of another person till a hand was laid upon his arm, and a rough voice asked, “ Is this Ralph Riley, the gardener ? ”

“ Yes, it's me,” said he ; “ but what do you want ? ”

“ You are my prisoner, sir,” replied the other ; “ I am an officer of justice, and was sent to arrest you for stealing.”

"Stealin'!" cried Ralph. "I never stole nothin' in all my life. Don't — O, don't take me to prison!"

"You must come — there's no help for it!" said the officer, as he led the poor frightened fellow away, and left a note for his master.

"Where are you goin' to take me to?" asked Ralph, as he tremblingly obeyed the order to get into the carriage which was waiting for them.

"To the person who sent me," said the other; "I don't know any more about it."

Friendless, alone, and now a criminal, Ralph gave himself up to despair. What matter was it to him, he thought, what became of him! But soon the carriage stopped, and the prisoner was at once conducted into a small, comfortable apartment, he knew not where.

"This an't so bad, after all," said he to himself, as he looked around. "I thought they was goin' to put me into a dungin."

Just at this moment the door opened, and a gentleman advanced with extended hand and cordial smile. "Forgive me, Ralph," said he, "that I was obliged to play such a trick to get you here; you were so shut in there, at the chateau, I could not come near you; and Myrtie told me to find you, and ——"

"What! Myrtie, my darlin', blessed birdie!" cried Ralph, eagerly; "where is she? O, tell me, sir, if you can!"

"She's safe and well," said the gentleman, smiling at Ralph's earnestness, "and wants you to come to her in her own home."

"O, sir!" and Ralph fell on his knees, while the tears

streamed down his cheeks, "I'd be willin' to die the next minit, if I could only see her sweet face once more!"

"You *shall* see her, Ralph; not once only, but every day of your life, if you will go with me," said Robert Graham, wiping away the tears which would gather in his eyes.

"I'd go to the eend o' this world, and into the next, to find her,— the light o' this old heart! I han't been myself a minit since she went away; but I's mighty glad when she got away from them ugly faces, any how!"

"Ralph, you have been a good, kind, true-hearted friend to Myrtie; and she loves you, as she ought to."

"Bless her eyes, she's an angel an' nothin' else! I knew the Blessed Virgin'd help her through, any how! but how'd she git away? an' where's Charlie? an' how come you to know 'em?"

So Robert told him how they escaped and got home; and how he, their new father, had come over to get their property away from the wicked priests; and how they had charged him not to return without Ralph; and how he had managed to get him arrested, so that Bernaldi would n't suspect anything; and now he was going to take care of him till they could all go together to Myrtie, where he should always have a home with his birdie.

Ralph laughed and cried all in one breath, as Mr. Graham concluded. "O dear," said he, "I thought, little while ago, I was dyin' o' grief; and now I can't stan' this no better! I *shall* die, I'm so happy, I tell ye!"

Again the three unwelcome visitors presented themselves at Mr. Markland's office, at the time appointed the preceding

day ; but, to their surprise, no one was present except Bernaldi, who deigned neither by look nor gesture to notice their entrance.

"I had hoped," said Mr. Stuart, "to find a large number present this morning."

"There is no necessity for it," replied Mr. Markland. "Father Bernaldi is here to represent the church to which Sir Charles Duncan has bequeathed his whole property, and I act as agent for the testator. What more is needed ?"

"Still," persisted Mr. Stuart, "I object to proceeding without witnesses ; and, as you have none, I shall take the liberty to introduce a few myself." Saying which, he left the room, and soon returned with a dozen or more gentlemen, most of them well known to the lawyer and priest.

"I protest against this whole proceeding," exclaimed the latter, angrily. "That upstart," pointing to Mr. Graham, "has the audacity, I suppose, to think he can break Sir Charles' will. You'll find yourself in a bad place soon, sir, let me tell you !"

"Let us attend to business, without further parley," said Mr. Stuart, addressing Mr. Markland ; and then in a concise manner he presented the claims of Sir Charles Duncan's children as his legal heirs, and demanded an immediate settlement of his property upon them.

"But the *will*, Mr. Stuart ! you surely forget the *will* !" exclaimed the attorney, with astonishment.

"I do not forget the instrument purporting to be the will of Sir Charles Duncan," replied Mr. Stuart, with terrible emphasis ; "but here, in the presence of these witnesses, I pronounce that document a forgery !"

"Infamous liar!" cried Bernaldi, purpling with rage "prove your words, if you can!"

"I intend to do so," coolly returned Mr. Stuart, "if Mr. Markland will put a few of these witnesses under oath."

"I will do nothing of the kind," said the attorney; "they could prove nothing; this is all child's play."

"Just as you please," returned Mr. Stuart. "Your choice lies between doing it here, or in the public court-room, to which one of the gentlemen present has a summons for you both."

"What would you have or do, Mr. Stuart?" asked the attorney, somewhat mollified by the aspect of things.

"I would have justice done to the innocent and persecuted; ay and to the *guilty*, also," replied he, turning to the priest.

"This is insufferable!" exclaimed Bernaldi, springing to his feet. "I, for one, will no longer bear such insolence!"

"As I said before," returned Mr. Stuart, "you can choose whether you will meet this charge here, fairly, or have it referred to a legal tribunal, where there will be no secrets."

Mr. Markland drew Bernaldi aside, and, after a few moments' consultation, proposed sending for Bishop Percy and a few others, to which Mr. Graham readily assented.

How like the hushed breath which oft presages the coming whirlwind and storm was the ominous silence which reigned in that room as the messenger departed swiftly on his errand! Even Bernaldi felt its oppression, as his eye glanced uneasily around, to detect, if possible, some indications of the approaching struggle. But the face of Mr. Stuart was immovably calm; and, though a shade of triumph rested upon

Robert Graham's brow, he completely baffled the penetrating glance bestowed upon him. The suspense was at length becoming painful, when, greatly to the relief of all, steps were heard ascending the stairs, and in a moment, throwing wide open the door, his servant announced "his most holy reverence the bishop." Bowing and smiling most obsequiously, Mr. Markland advanced, and apologized in no measured terms for the necessity he felt of summoning one so exalted to his humble abode. Drawing himself up, with hauteur, the bishop replied,

"Your reasons are doubtless satisfactory, Mr. Markland; I only regret that we must tolerate, even for a few moments, the presence of *such* persons!" and, as he spoke, he cast a withering look of scorn and contempt upon Robert Graham and his friend Mr. Lee. Paying not the slightest heed to the remark, or the look which accompanied it, Mr. Stuart inquired if they were now in readiness to proceed.

"I believe so," was Mr. Markland's reply.

"Then," said Mr. Stuart, "I will now reiterate my assertion. That will I pronounce a forgery — a most infamous device, to wrest from Sir Charles Duncan's lawful heirs his immense property."

"Are you aware of the risk you incur by that assertion, unless fully proved?" asked Mr. Markland, whose cheek paled at the task before him.

"Most assuredly I am," replied Mr. Stuart, contemptuously; "but I come prepared to prove the charge."

"Do it, if you can!" shouted the bishop, forgetting himself in his anger; "but remember, you shall answer for this hereafter!"

"I shall be ready to do so, sir," quietly replied Mr. Stuart;

and then, turning to Mr. Markland, he added, "You will now oblige me by producing the instrument you *call* Sir Charles' will."

Most reluctantly was this request complied with; for those guilty, craven hearts quailed before the attorney's determined glance.

"There," said Mr. Markland, handing him the document, "you will find it difficult, I imagine, to detect a flaw in that will. It cost Sir Charles and myself many days' labor to draw it up to his satisfaction, and you see it is well attested."

"Where are the witnesses now?" abruptly inquired Mr. Stuart.

"Well, really, I don't know; but I suppose they could be found, if necessary," replied Mr. Markland, with some confusion.

"It will not be necessary," said Mr. Stuart, emphatically. "I see," continued he, "that the manufacturers' stamp upon this paper is that of Messrs. Levin & Co. As those gentlemen are present, will they oblige me by stepping forward."

Immediately two gentlemen, of prepossessing appearance, came towards the lawyers.

"My name is Levin," said the eldest, "and this is my partner, Mr. Rogers."

Mr. Markland bowed stiffly, and Mr. Stuart continued,

"The purpose for which I requested your presence here to-day, gentlemen, you will understand presently. First, however, Mr. Markland will please administer the customary oath; for I wish to show you that this is no 'child's play.'"

"Mr. Stuart, this is carrying your folly altogether too far," exclaimed the bishop, imperiously; "it cannot be allowed,"

"With all deference to you, sir," replied the lawyer, "I am employed by the guardian of Sir Charles Duncan's heirs to investigate his affairs, and obtain for them their property."

"Which cannot be done while that will exists," returned the other.

"But I am prepared to prove that Sir Charles never made that will."

"A modest assertion, truly!" said the bishop, sneeringly; "pray, who, then, do you charge with the forgery?"

"It were wise for you, sir," significantly answered the lawyer, "not to press that question too earnestly. My duty to my clients will be performed fearlessly, and, if any further impediments are offered here, we shall refer the case at once to a more public tribunal. Decide now;—shall I proceed or not?" and he calmly awaited their answer.

The bishop, priest and lawyer, conversed apart for a few moments, and then the latter replied,

"We are indifferent to your proceedings, Mr. Stuart; we do not fear to meet you here or elsewhere; but, if here, how can the question be satisfactorily settled?"

"By the decision of a majority of those present, excluding all personally interested," answered Mr. Stuart.

"But how are we to know they are not already pledged to your interests?" Bernaldi asked.

Mr. Stuart cast a pitiful glance at the priest, and then, turning to the company, he said,

"If there is one gentleman present who knows the object for which he has been summoned here, I pray you let it be known." But they all averred that they came in at Mr.

Stuart's request, to witness some transaction, of what nature they knew not.

Bernaldi gazed searchingly into each face in that large group, and was apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, for he said, "Let us proceed, then, and end this foolish affair without delay. But your witnesses must be examined separately."

"Certainly, sir," replied Mr. Stuart, motioning Mr. Rogers and another gentleman out of the room. "Now, Mr. Levin," said he, as that gentleman was placed under oath, "will you examine the paper upon which that will is written, and tell us if you manufactured it?"

Mr. Levin examined it carefully, then held it up to the light a moment, and answered, without hesitation, "We did, sir."

"Is there no possibility of your being mistaken?"

"Not the slightest, sir; for, to prevent that, we have a private mark of our own."

"How long have you been in the business?"

"About thirty years."

"Have you always used the same stamp or private mark?"

"Our paper has always been stamped as you see this is," he replied, pointing to a corner of the sheet, "but latterly we have adopted a more private mark, by which we can at once identify our own manufacture."

"Latterly, did you say? How long since you adopted it?"

"About three months, as you will see by the date which is attached to the mark;" and he held it up so that each one could see.

During this reply, Bernaldi had sprung to his feet, with dilated eyes and compressed lips; for he, too, saw the evidence of his guilt unmistakably clear before their eyes.

"Now let us hear what our other witnesses may say," said Mr. Stuart, without noticing the priest's agitation.

"I shall question him myself!" Mr. Markland exclaimed, angrily, as the partner of Mr. Levin appeared.

"Do so," replied Mr. Stuart.

"In the first place, then," said the lawyer, "I would ask the witness if there is such a material difference between one bit of paper and another, that he would dare to identify it, if the life of a fellow-being hung upon his decision."

"I should not dare to identify it, sir, unless I had some peculiar reason."

"And is there anything peculiar, in the paper of your own manufacture, by which you could distinguish it from any other?"

"There is, sir, in the paper we have made within the last two or three months."

"What is it?"

"A private mark, which we agreed upon, and which we have pressed into the paper, with the date of its adoption."

"Did this paper come from your manufactory?" asked Mr. Stuart, handing him the will.

He looked through it, as his partner had done, and then said, "It did, sir; and here is the mark and date of which I spoke."

"How long since that paper was made?"

"It must have been made within three months."

"What need have we of further evidence?" cried Mr. Stuart, looking around. "Sir Charles Duncan has been dead

these twelve years; and yet, on this sheet of paper, not three months old, is his will professed to have been written!"

"The will is a forgery!" resounded on all sides; "there can be no doubt of it."

"Who, then, is the villain?" sternly demanded he of Mr. Markland.

"Indeed, Mr. Stuart, you need n't ask me," replied he, angrily; "all I know about it is, I drew up such a will for Sir Charles, and supposed this was the same one. It must be a copy of it."

"Miserable subterfuge!" exclaimed Mr. Stuart. "But I have neither time nor patience to waste on you. Make restitution this moment to those you have wronged, or I place you in the hands of the law."

All the dark, malignant passions which had been working fearfully in Bernaldi's heart during this scene now burst forth uncontrollably; and he hurled the most bitter, deadly invectives upon Robert Graham, Mr. Lee, and even the bishop himself.

"He is a madman!" said the latter, contemptuously; "and no wonder, when he has such evil spirits to contend with."

The frantic priest vainly endeavored to make his escape amidst the confusion. Two strong arms restrained him, while Mr. Stuart said, "I have not yet done with you, Sir priest. You will just give me a check for fifty thousand pounds, with interest added, the sum Mr. Markland has paid you from Sir Charles' estate!"

"You have got to prove Sir Charles' marriage before you can get anything!" retorted the priest, exultingly; "and that, you know, you can't do."

“Not so fast!” cried Mr. Stuart. “I have the proof here, and you may just sign that check, or the Bow-street officers, who wait below, will take you in charge! And you, Mr. Markland, will transfer to me at once all Sir Charles’ property, of whatever nature.”

“Well, friend,” said James Lee, who had remained a silent, though not an unmoved spectator of the whole scene, — and, as he spoke, he patted familiarly the bishop’s shoulder, — “what thinkest thou now? Dost thou not see the hand of the great Avenger in all this? Are not the bitter tears of anguish thou hast wrung from a mother’s heart now dropping like molten lead into thine own? Verily, friend, I envy thee not the vigils thou’lt keep this night!”

“Am I to be forever baffled thus?” cried Bernaldi, gnashing his teeth with rage, as he that night made a few hasty preparations for flight. “Yes!” whispered conscience, in a voice so clear he started with fright, “so long as innocence and purity are your chosen victims, you have an invisible foe to meet, whose shield is *truth*; against which your barbed arrows rebound to your own breast!”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“Were my whole life to come one heap of troubles,
The pleasure of this moment would suffice,
And sweeten all my griefs with its remembrance.”

LEE’S “MITHRIDATES.”

GLADLY do we turn from scenes of guilt and retribution, to the cheerful group gathered on the deck of the “Orient,” that white-winged messenger which, a few months since, so quickly sped on its mission of love, bearing the mother’s gems to her breast. Now, though freighted with golden treasures and joyous hearts, the proud waves stay not their angry dash and roar, as when childhood breathed its pure and holy calm along the watery path.

Captain Glynn, who had been pacing with rapid strides the deck of the noble ship, his weather-beaten face glowing with pride and happiness, suddenly stopped before the group.

“Now, friends,” said he, “my heart is so full I must make a short yarn of what I’m going to say. Little did I think, when I promised Marguerite to take that poor boy and girl into my craft, what would be the end of it! But, here I stand, the *owner* and master of as handsome a clipper as ever crossed the ocean,—*the gift of those children!*—no longer to be called the ‘Orient,’ but, with your leave,” bowing to Mr

Graham, and, giving a signal to the crew, "there's the name of *my* craft." Up rose the broad streamer, and, gracefully unfolding to the breeze, displayed, in gilded letters, "CHARLIE AND MYRTIE." A shout of joy from the little group gave their welcome appreciation of the grateful tribute, as the silken pennant floated above them, its bright wings plumed for homeward flight!

Loud and long rose Ralph's shout above all others, as he saw his "birdie's" name shining so brightly above him. "What 'ud his ruv'rence say now," quoth he, "ef he know'd old Ralph's a-sailin' under *that* flag, and he thinkin' all the time I's in prison! He! he! he!" chuckled he, as he groped his way down to tell the story to the sailors.

"Verily, friend Robert," said the Quaker, wiping a tear from his eye, "how hast thy life changed since thou and I first met — yea, and mine also!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Graham, "and to you I feel that I owe much of my present happiness. Your kind words and counsel have strengthened me in many a dark hour, when my heart failed me."

"Now all is bright about thee," added the other, "thou must guard well thy heart, lest it be satisfied with earthly good."

"I will remember your caution," said Robert, smiling, "for I grant I am in some danger."

"There are others, if I mistake not," remarked Mr. Stuart, "who have many of life's changes to reflect upon. What think you, for instance, of Bernaldi, revelling, but a few months since, in the spoils of innocence, and the power to blight and

crush whomsoever he chose — now forced to flee from an outraged and exasperated community? ”

“He carries his base heart with him,” said Mr. Lee; “from that he cannot flee.”

“No,” replied Mr. Stuart; “and I fear his wicked designs may not always be frustrated, as in your case, Mr. Graham.”

“Doubtless he will go about ‘seeking whom he may devour,’ ” answered Robert, with a shudder; “but God grant that neither he nor any other Jesuit may ever cross my path again! ”

How eagerly did Ralph rise with each morning sun, and stretch forth his neck to catch, perchance, a glimpse of the land where his “birdie” dwelt! To him the days wore slowly away. “Seems to me,” said he, one morning, “this ’tarnal old hulk keeps a-goin’ right round one pint — nothin’ but water to-day, and nothin’ but water yesterday, and ever so many days afore that. I b’leve the whole world’s turned to water!” But Ralph’s suspense was soon relieved. That very afternoon one of the crew, pointing to a long dark line on the horizon, asked him if he saw that.

“See what?” said he; “that snaky-lookin’ thing way off on top o’ the water?”

“Ho! ho! you lubber, don’t you know that’s land?”

Ralph looked at the sailor in amazement, rubbed his eyes, and then looked again in the direction he pointed; but it required more faith than he possessed to connect that dark object with the land of his dreams. Yet still he gazed, and gazed, till his eyes ached and his brain reeled; gradually the dark line seemed expanding and looming up in the dis-

tance, when the conviction suddenly flashed upon his mind that the sailor's words were true.

"Hurra! hurra!" screamed he, in a voice which brought every soul on deck; "there's my blessed birdie's land! Seems to me this old hulk 'll never fetch there, though. O, dear! dear! I could a'most jump across, this minit!"

But on, swiftly on, the buoyant vessel glided, notwithstanding Ralph's fears, while every eye gazed intently on the still distant shores.

"By to-morrow," said Robert Graham, as they retired to their berths that night, "we shall have quite a distinct view of the land;" and, with a grateful heart, he laid him down to sleep and dream of home.

But, all through that livelong night, with straining eyes, vainly endeavoring to peer through its darkness, sat the honest old gardener; sleep came not near his eyelids, for memory and hope were busily weaving their chains about his heart. Anxiously he watched for the first gray streak of dawn, and when its faint light revealed a boldly-defined shore, even nearer than he had dared to hope, his joy knew no bounds. Shuffling along as fast as his clumsy feet would carry him, he gave a very decided knock at Robert Graham's state-room door. "Mister Graham!" said he, "Mister Graham! we're a'most to 'Meriky!" Then seizing a great dinner-bell which lay on a table near him, he rang its loud notes with an unsparing hand, causing the sleepers to spring from their berths with affright.

"Verily, Ralph," said the Quaker, coming on deck, "thou art beside thyself, this morning. What aileth thee?"

"O, we've a'most got there, Mr. Lee. Seems to me I can't

stan' it, no way, till I see my birdie's sweet face again!" and off he went to feast his eyes on the land which contained his treasure.

"The happiest home in all Asheville, save one," said Mrs. Lindsey, smiling, as she entered Anna's parlor, one afternoon, and found her seated lovingly with her children.

"No, Bessie," replied Anna, "I shall not admit even your exception; mine is the happiest home in all the world!"

"And I'm the happiest girl in the world," cried Myrtie, throwing back her sunny curls, and dimpling her face with a bright smile.

"You are the most beautiful, at least," thought Mrs. Lindsey, as she kissed the sweet mouth and gazed into the deep-blue eye of the fair girl. Myrtie was lovely; but her winning *simplicity* was the charm which drew all hearts to her.

"I really believe I am the happiest of you all," said Charlie, a noble, manly boy of fifteen; "but when father comes,"—and he looked roguishly at his mother,— "we shall all have to yield the point to him."

Anna smiled, and, telling him to run down to the post-office and see if there was any news from that father, she said to Bessie, "It is not so very weak and foolish, after all, to pride myself on such a boy as that, — is it, Bessie?"

"Weak and foolish!" repeated Bessie, her eyes suffused with tears; "no, indeed, dear Anna! you have in your children all a mother's heart could wish; if anything could repay your years of suffering, it would be the restoration of *such* treasures."

"Here, mother!" cried Charlie, bounding into the room with a joyful step, "here's a letter from father, post-marked in Boston; now you are glad, I know."

Anna quickly broke the seal, while Charlie and Myrtie impatiently awaited the news.

"Only think," said their mother, as she concluded reading, "they have arrived in Boston, and will be here nearly as soon as this letter — this very night, probably!"

"Has Ralph come, too, mother?"

"Yes, my daughter, and you can hardly wish to see him more than I do."

"O, how glad, how *glad* I am!" cried Myrtie, clapping her hands for joy. "Dear, good Ralph! he shall always live with me now!"

"And, besides Ralph," said Mrs. Graham, "there's Mr. Stuart and his wife, and Captain Glynn and his wife, all your friends, my children — I might say, your deliverers!"

"Yes," said Charlie, "and all the friends we had, except Margery and Father Ambrose."

"And Sister Agnes!" added Myrtie, warmly.

"Cherish them all with great love," said their mother, "for our present joy we owe to them. But go now, my boy, and gather in our home circle to greet the welcome visitors. You, dear Bessie, belong to us; so you must remain and let your husband join you here."

"O, Anna, my dearly-cherished sister!" exclaimed Bessie, "most sincerely do I rejoice with you that your grief is thus turned into gladness, and the dark cloud removed, as I trust, *forever* from your path!"

The news of the expected arrival had quickly spread

through the village; and long before the travellers reached Robert Graham's house, they were greeted with shouts of welcome along the road. Hand in hand stood Charlie and Myrtie at the gate, eagerly watching for the first glimpse of faces they had known only in sorrow. Near them the happy wife and mother, with parted lips and flushed cheeks, waited to receive not only a loved husband, but those who had guarded her best treasures when lost to her. The group around the door, crowned by the white flowing locks of the aged grandfather, watched, with joyful sympathy, for the expected guests.

"Here they come!" cried Myrtie, as two carriages drove rapidly up to the house; and, unheeding all else, she flew to the extended arms of a rough being, who had no eyes save for her.

"Dear, good Ralph!" exclaimed she, "how glad I am to see you!"

"There — 't an't no use — I can't say nothin'!" said Ralph, choking with each word, as he hugged her closely to his breast. "Birdie darlin' — darlin' birdie!" Then holding out an arm to Charlie, he enclosed within that warm embrace all *his* world. Not an undimmed eye looked upon them, for all knew through what suffering that strange friendship had been nurtured, and what devotion had bound these young hearts to their childhood's protector.

"Children," at length said their mother, approaching them with streaming eyes, "let me, too, bless your old friend; for even you cannot feel as I do how much we owe to him!"

"Come, birdie, let's go 'way sum'mers — I can't stan' this

no longer!" cried Ralph, as Myrtie's mother poured forth in warm terms her gratitude to him.

"Wait till Myrtie has greeted her other friends," said Mrs. Graham, smiling kindly on him. "You and she will not be parted again for many a year, I trust."

"I'd never ask for nothin' more'n to serve my birdie allers," said he, wiping his eyes, and gazing after her fair form.

She, glad and joyous as the birds, flitted from one to another, warming each heart with her sunny smiles; while Charlie, in a more dignified though no less cordial manner, warmly welcomed the friends of his darker hours. Mr. Stuart no longer wondered at Lady Emilie's enthusiastic generosity, and Captain Glynn felt that henceforth his "craft" would be doubly dear to him, with its new colors.

"Come, wife," said Mr. Graham, in the midst of their rejoicings, "let us give our friends a seat under the great elm across the way. I've got a little piece of news reserved for you, yet."

"For me?" asked she, looking up in surprise.

"Yes, Anna, for you; and, as it is something very agreeable, I choose to tell it in a pleasant spot.—There, Mr. Stuart, what do you think of this?" he added, as they grouped themselves under the wide-spreading branches.

"Delightful! delightful!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"But the news, Robert!" said his wife; "tell us the news, now!"

"I am not going to give you a lecture," said he, laughingly, as their voices were hushed, and all eyes turned with expectation to him, "but I must tell you that our little Myr-

tie, here, is the richest heiress in all the state — I had almost said the country ! ”

“ How ’s that ? ” cried several voices at once.

“ Mr. Stuart, will give you the particulars. I can only say that those dear children who were stolen beneath this very tree have been restored not only to their mother’s arms, but to their rightful possessions. And, though Charlie’s inheritance is princely, Myrtie’s has the addition of Lady Emilie’s fortune ! Thus, as on this memorable spot began, *so may here forever end, THE MOTHER’S TRIAL.* ”

ANNA CLAYTON.

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